Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

PSYCHOLOGY AND CAPITALISM

A FIGHTBACK PAMPHLET
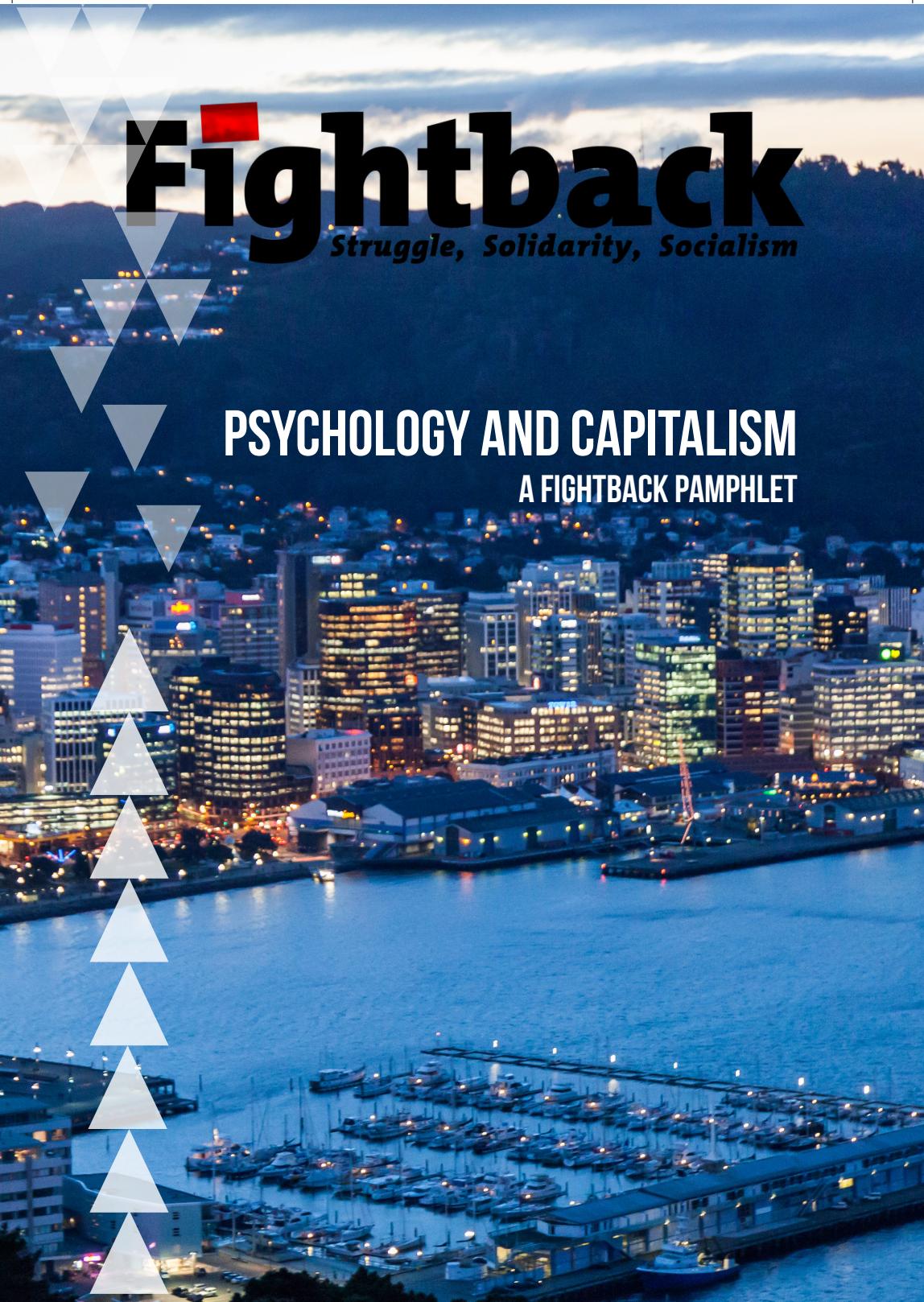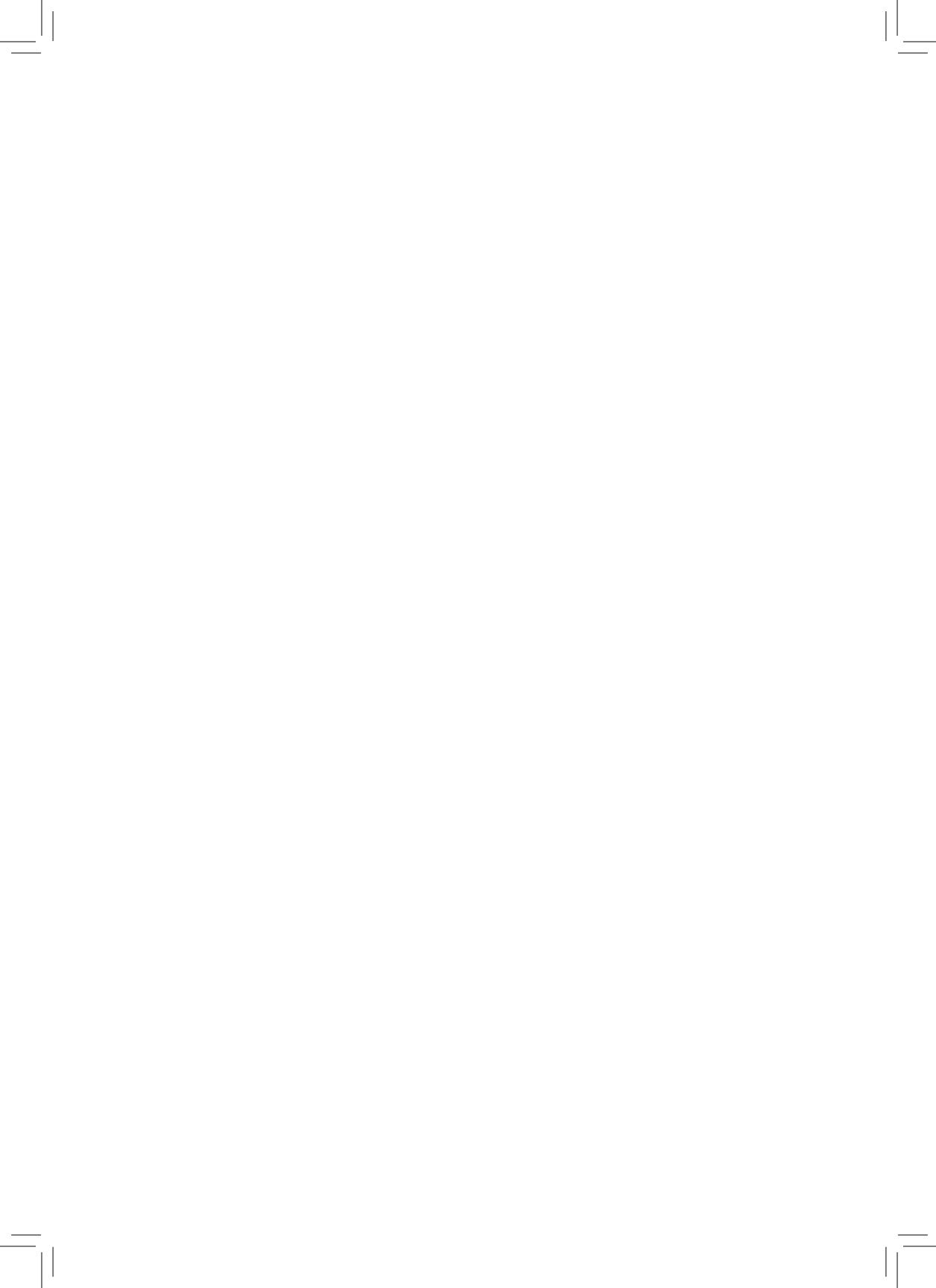
CONTENTS

THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH

by Polly Peek, Fightback member, mental health consumer and support worker.

Dialectics is a method of thinking which emphasises change through interaction. In this article the term 'mental health community' refers to those people experiencing mental illness or distress, and 'consumer' refers to those using or having previously used psychiatric services.

The role work plays in the mental health of people experiencing mental illness is complex, with research on the topic appearing somewhat contradictory on the surface, the most prominent contradiction being whether work is overall beneficial or detrimental to well-being and recovery. Research suggests that employment, or engagement in meaningful contribution, is a "critical component of the pathway to recovery" (Mental Health Commission, 2001, cited in Duncan and Peterson, 2007) and that the most significant employment challenge for people experiencing mental illness is overcoming structural barriers to attaining work. At the same time, other studies indicate that the correlation between work and wellness is not so clear-cut, and that the kinds of jobs most accessible to the mental health community are also those with the highest likelihood of decreasing well-being and obstructing recovery.

In approaching this conflict through a dialectical analysis, the balance of interplay between work and mental health moves from a question of 'is work more beneficial or detrimental to recovery and wellbeing' to one of 'how can the contradictions of employment's simultaneous facilitation and eroding of wellness be resolved'. To assess how features of work in the broad sense are facilitative or detrimental to recovery and wellbeing, it is first necessary to define these terms. The concept of recovery as a mental health philosophy began in psychiatric rehabilitation establishments in the USA around the early 1990's. Around the same time, mental health consumer movements in the US and around the world began to shape their definition of recovery, focussing on self-determination and "emphasising the social, economic and political dimensions of recovery" (O'Hagan, 2008). Through its appropriation and development by different groups, recovery became the "first genuinely post-institutional service philosophy" (O'Hagan, 2008). In the New Zealand context, recovery has been integrated into practise through three models: the recovery approach, recovery competencies for mental health workers, and the recover principles. These principles are closely aligned with the concept of mental health recovery as first developed by Anthony (1993), who defined eight key principles:

- Recovery can occur without professional intervention
- Recovery is the presence of people who believe in and stand by the person in need of recovery
- A recovery vision is not a function of one's theory about the causes of mental illness

- Recovery can occur even though symptoms reoccur
- Recovery changes the frequency and duration of symptoms
- Recovery does not feel like a linear process
- Recovery from the consequences of the illness is sometimes more difficult than recovery from the illness itself
- Recovery from mental illness does not mean that someone was not -really 'mentally ill'

(Anthony, cited in Kelly et al, 2010).

In querying how employment can help or hinder recovery, the above principles will be a reference point as well as the New Zealand Mental Health Commission's definition of recovery as "living well in the presence or absence of illness". Well-being is a concept drawn upon by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its definition of health as "not merely freedom from disease, but also a state of fulfilment – physically, emotionally, economically and in social relations" (Bellaby, 1999, p15).

In the New Zealand context wellbeing is often understood with reference to hauora – Maori understandings and models of health or wellness. One widely used model of wellbeing is Mason Durie's Whare Tapa Wha model, a diagrammatic representation of wellness utilising the visual of a 'four walled house' where each wall is related to one aspect of wellbeing; physical, mental/emotional, social and spiritual. Other Maori models of wellbeing which are less utilised or well-known, possibly for their relative complexity or politicised foundations (Wenn, ND), include Pere's Te Wheke – the octopus and Durie's Nga Pou Mana. When discussing the impact of employment on well-being, I will be drawing on concepts within the Whare Tapa Wha model, exploring how work impacts people's mental emotional/health directly, as well as impacting the social relations and supports, physical or material aspects of the person's life, and sense of purpose, meaning and world view, all of which influence mental health.

The belief that productive activity can be beneficial to people experiencing chronic and long term mental illness has been developed over the last two centuries since it was first promoted in psychiatric establishments by French physician Philippe Pinel. Along with implementing other progressive reforms, Pinel was one of the first institution doctors to take a recovery approach, believing his patients could be cured and returned to society. He advocated for "activity rather than idleness and systematic programmes of activity as well as cognitive work to restore reason" (Hunter & Macalpine, 1963; Shorter, 1997 cited in Southern, 2010) and, resultantly, is considered one of the greatest reformers of the mental health care system since its beginning.

Today in New Zealand and other Western countries, the value of work in recovery is practically recognised through the maintenance of occupational therapy programs and supported employment services (Duncan and Peterson, 2007). As Annie Southern highlights in her thesis "Researchers often work from the 'given' that work has a therapeutic impact and underpins economic status and identity" (2010, p121) and it has been argued that an uncritical

acceptance of this premise is rooted in the understanding of "compulsory employment as 'natural' and 'normal'" (Southern, 2010, p121). This perspective is promoted by a world-view which sees the benefits of work for people with long-term mental illness to be exclusively instrumental, in that it is beneficial only insofar as society attributes values to work and is bound by the social cohesiveness that results from it. I would argue that work is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable in supporting mental health recovery and wellness.

The instrumental value of employment is that it creates opportunities for mental health consumers to access additional resources to improve their health and wellbeing such as financial resources and supportive social networks. From a Bourdieuian perspective, therefore, employment allows people with experience of mental illness to beneficially increase their social and economic capital. The benefit of these resources has been expanded on in research exploring resilience factors for mental health. One example of this is a 2002 Ministry of Health publication which cites economic security as being crucial for well-being as well as the availability of opportunities. Because of the lower-than- minimum-wage rate of benefits in New Zealand society and difficulties attaining work without experience, the mental health benefits that come from economic security and accessibility of opportunities is likely to disproportionately benefit those in paid work in comparison to the unemployed.

In terms of the intrinsic value of work in facilitating wellness and recovery, research shows that an 'employed' status is beneficial in that it fosters positive self-image. In her thesis on New Zealand Women's career experiences through mental illness, Annie Southern quotes Neff (2006) that "to be able to work in a work-oriented society is to be 'like' others … unemployment can only exacerbate feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem". Additional research has found that work can facilitate wellbeing and recovery by providing identity outside of the family unit, enhancing positive self-concept, feelings of mastery through acquiring new skills, feeling of being 'normal,' and increasing confidence.

Along with reported improvements in self-esteem and feelings of wellness and competence, clinical improvements have also been shown to be correlated with employment. Hospital admissions and length of stays, relapses, use of medication and psychiatric symptoms can be reduced if people with mental illness are employed. Research that proves the benefit of employment for recovery in this way supports the view that "it is rehabilitatively useful for people with even severe and prolonged psychiatric illness to be in work" (VandenBoom & Lustig, 1997). This is also supported by a number of consumer definitions of recovery published on the Centre For Recovery Awareness website which equate recovery with occupation – "working is recovery" (Share Centre patron), or with activities that induce feelings of contribution, purpose and meaning – "recovery is living-not surviving" (Recovering Mental Health Client), "volunteering is recovery" (Share Centre patron), "recovery is a purpose outside one's self" (Psychiatric patient).

These occupational understandings of recovery fit with the findings of qualitative research undertaken by Kelly, Lamont and Brunero looking at the recovery experiences of consumers participating in a task-orientated support group, GROW. In this paper, occupation was un-

derstood to be "the doing of any activity by a real person at a specific point in time, whereby engagement in the occupation has the opportunity to influence purposefully one's culture" (Kramer et al, 2003, cited in Kelly et al) so did not focus on paid employment, rather capturing the experiences of these volunteer peer support workers. One participant commented on the confidence he had gained saying "If this group of people were willing to accept me as their organiser, maybe I can do a lot of other things as well." Another participant alluded to the potential occupational opportunity has for the recovery of people experiencing acute mental health issues, "I know people in 4A [psychiatric unit], they'd love to be able to swing their legs out of bed and wash the floor and why 'cause they'd have something to do." In terms of paid employment, a Mental Health Foundation Study also based on qualitative data found that "employment was a positive experience" for the people interviewed (Peterson, 2007).

Supporting the idea that work is beneficial to mental health, is research which indicates unemployment "tends to have a significant adverse effect on both physical and mental health" for the majority of people (Acheson, 1998). This relates to long-term unemployment where studies have found substantial deterioration of mental health when measured for minor psychiatric morbidity over the first six months of unemployment and a slight decline for the following two-year period. Mental health is also impacted at the time of job loss where the person feels overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness. Evidence also exists highlighting that for those moving from unemployment into paid employment, an increase in well-being is likely especially where the position taken on is permanent.

This anecdotal and empirical evidence indicates the benefits of employment, or work in the broader sense, for mental health consumers' wellbeing and recovery, including the decreased need to use mental health services. In light of this, we may expect that the employment rate for people with mental illness to be level with or greater than that of the general population, as tangata whai ora pursue wellness and recovery. Despite the evidence of benefits associated with meaningful activity and contribution, unemployment rates for people with experience of mental illness are considerably high. Less than half of the mental health consumer population in New Zealand were in employment at the time of a study by Jenson, Sathiyandra, Rochford, Jones, Krishnan and McLeod. The researchers found the level of employment amongst mental health consumers to be 44%, with approximately 27% being full-time employees.

For a number of reasons such as employment discrimination and its structural basis, this places people with experience of mental illness amongst those disability groupswith the lowest levels of employment. The low employment rates for people experiencing mental ill health can be attributed to a combination of individual discrimination and, more predominantly, systemic barriers. Research into occupational perspectives on recovery by Kelly, Lamont and Brunero, highlighted the experiences of a mental health consumer who was forced to take early retirement by his employers upon disclosure that he was seeing a psychiatrist. This kind of anecdotal evidence may give perspective to the question of whether mental ill health leads to unemployment, or loss of employment erodes resiliency with the suggestion that where illness leads to unemployment, it may, in many cases not result exclusively from symptom

recovery but external issues such as inter-personal discrimination.

   I would argue that in these situations individual discrimination is a result of a wider systemic issue that is the bottom-line focus of businesses. This priority is evident in research such as that produced by London School of Economics and Political Science researchers which outlines the annual loss to businesses of 10 billion pounds as a result of "failure of employees to fulfil their contractual hours" while absent from work sick. Extending on this, the authors cite the increasing presence of mental illness in the global burden of disease as a reason for some people being absent from work up to three times as often as their colleagues. While similar findings have featured in New Zealand research such as that undertaken by Southern Cross, and cited in the NZ Herald in 2009, more attention to the abilities of employers to reduce the impact of mental illness on workplace performance could improve employment opportunities for people with mental illness in the absence of a larger societal change away from prioritising profit.

   Of course, in an economic system based on competition, it could be considered unrealistic to rely on employers' compassionate interest in mental health to significantly improve employment and health outcomes for tangata whai ora. The potential benefits of assistance and awareness campaigns centred on this approach are limited and a focus on broader changes to the way we organise work is needed. Another major systemic barrier to attaining work in New Zealand is the employment situation, driven by low wages that sees a considerable segment of society working greater than full-time hours. When full-time work is taken to mean thirty hours per week, 34.79% of full-time workers in New Zealand are considered to work 'long hours' of fifty or more hours a week according to the Department of Labour and Statistics NZ. While this significant percentage of workers spend long hours at work, the unemployment rate for New Zealand currently sits at 6.5%. So this illustrates, in New Zealand, the way that work hours are trending towards being polarised with a considerable segment of the working population being over-employed, and a significant number of working-aged people being unemployed. Reflecting on a similar situation in the US, American researchers have discussed the common issue of mismatches between workers' actual and preferred hours of work and the reduction in well-being that results from this incompatibility.

   Aside from the systemic barriers to achieving work which is beneficial to recovery and well-being, research suggests that not all jobs will have this positive impact for people with on-going mental ill health. Annie Southern summarises, "affiliation and integration with one's society can stem from a positive career experience whereas alienation from society can occur if negative experiences occur" while the International Labour Organisation asserts that "access to decent work is an antidote to social exclusion right across our global economy". Defining the components that make a career experience positive is difficult, however the International Labour Organisation has established the characteristics of decent work, identifying five key points:
   There should be sufficient work for all to have full access to income-earning opportunities; it generates an adequate income; workers' rights are protected in it; it is productive, not just

existing as 'work for work's sake'; it provides adequate social protection.
  (ILO, 1999, cited in Tipple, 2006)

Earlier this year, an Australian longitudinal study carried out by Butterworth and others, found that jobs which scored amongst the lowest in terms of psycho-social quality caused greater decline of mental well-being in workers who became employed than those who remained without work. This finding stood out against the trend of employment in higher psycho-social scoring jobs being related consistently with improved mental health. The study defined psycho-social quality in terms of levels of control, demands and complexity, job security and fairness of pay. These findings are supported by other studies such as that of Lewchuk, Clarke and de Wolff, which found "employment relationships where future employment is uncertain, where individuals are actively searching for new employment and where support is limited are associated with poorer health indicators".

The research on psycho-social quality of jobs and impact on well-being holds much relevance for the New Zealand mental health consumer population. Research has shown that people with experience of mental illness disproportionately tend to gain employment in low-paid jobs, and that the likelihood of this employment outcome can serve as a disincentive to seek work when unemployed. The evidence that many mental health consumers in New Zealand who access employment work in low paid jobs with few hours, remains true for people who access supported employment services, potentially explaining the reluctance of the mental health system to utilise organisations providing these services. In the current New Zealand labour situation it could also be argued that job security has recently decreased for people with experience of mental illness as well as the wider population as the 90-day trial employment period has been taken up by many employers. This, in combination with low levels of pay could reduce psycho-social job quality to a point where employment has detrimental impacts on consumers' recovery and wellbeing.
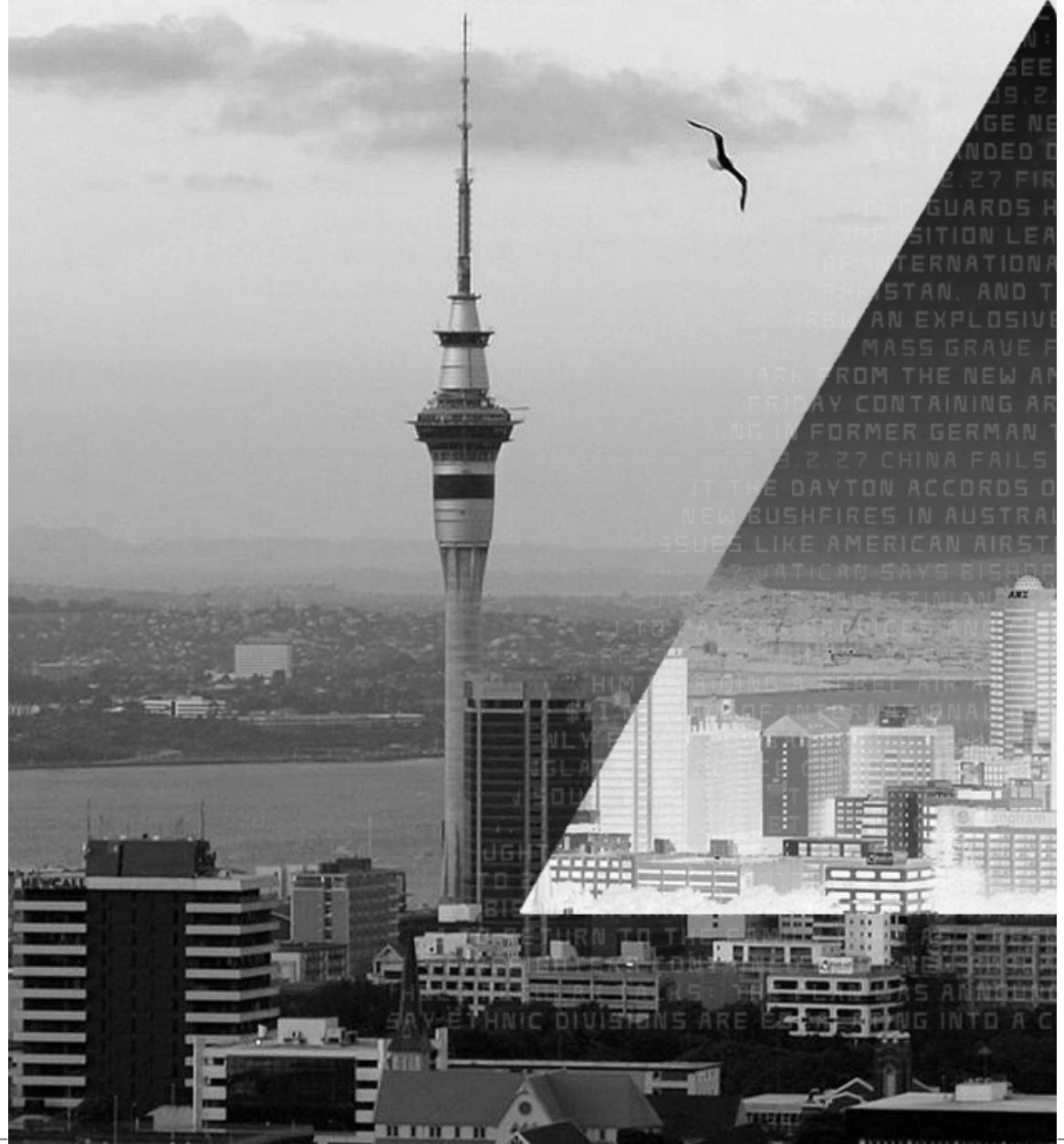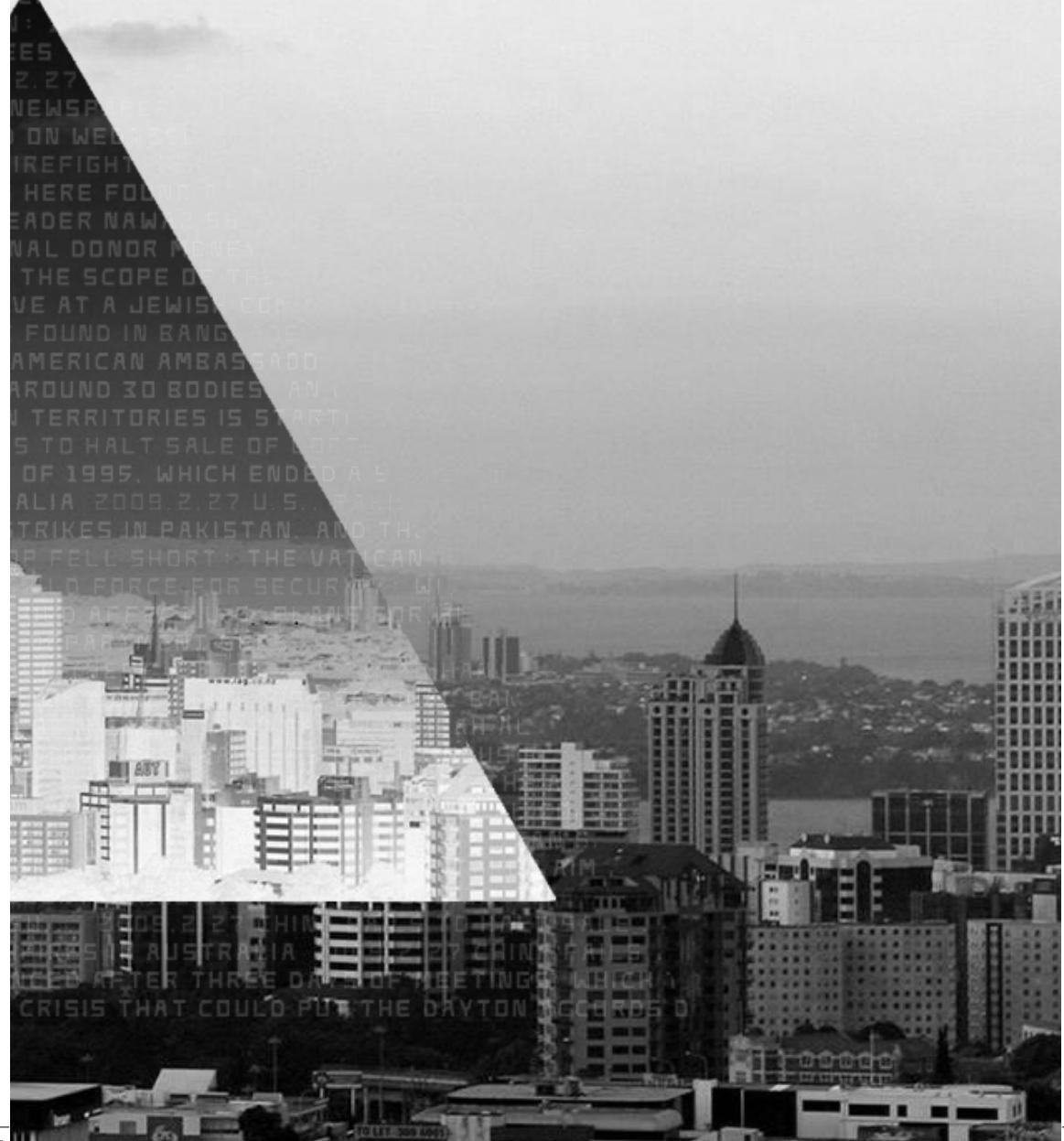
PSYCHOANALYTIC COMMUNISM: JODI DEAN'S CROWDS AND PARTY (REVIEW)

by Daphne Lawless, Fightback Tamaki Makarau/Auckland.

The other two articles in this pamphlet, by practitioners in the field, deal with mental health recovery under capitalism. By contrast, this piece deals with the controversial theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who is largely not taken seriously by mental health professionals in the English-speaking world. Lacan's psychoanalytic theories are more influential in the study of 'ideology' - the system of ideas that maintain capitalism.

0. Introduction/Warning

What follows is in the nature of a "gonzo" review[1], "written without claims of objectivity, including the reporter as part of the story via a first-person narrative". As someone who has been involved in the struggle to build something like a Communist Party on and off for 15 years, any review of Jodi Dean's contribution to the debate on what a successful version of this effort might look like in the current day and age which didn't directly involve my own experiences of trying to so would be... disingenuous, at best. Perhaps even dishonest. So be warned: this review will take some twists and turns, some shortcuts, some detours into personal experience, in my attempt to tease out what Dean's argument can mean for practice in Aotearoa/NZ in the here-and- now. If you are currently involved in the activist Left in Aotearoa/New Zealand, you may possibly resemble these remarks. Apologies in advance. I try do my comrades the credit of speaking my truth as I see it.

1. Against compulsory individualism...

Jodi Dean is an American political philosopher and academic, whose previous works include The Communist Horizon and Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies. So you can see from the very start that she's "on our side". Her goal in Crowds and Party is precisely to make the argument that individualism – and the forms of Left politics which accept it – means political defeat, despair and powerlessness. Neoliberalism in the Internet era – what Dean calls "communicative capitalism" (p. 11) – has perfected the use of individualism as a trap, a "form of capture" (p. 75) or "enclosure (p. 81). Forms of leftist or radical thought which try to appeal to individual needs, desires or aspirations will never be able, she argues, to break out of the current global dead-end for the Left, and so we should look to the crowd as the basis

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1   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonzo_journalism

2   *This idea of the "subject" comes from Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis, of which much more below (probably too much).*

3   http://faculty.washington.edu/cbehler/glossary/commonsense.html

from which a new communist politics can be built.

Dean's concept of "commanded individuality" (p. 31) is a frankly mammoth idea. It's quite difficult to grasp the extent to which the ruling ideas of our current society revolve around the concept that individuals – their wants, their desires, their ambitions – are the only "subjects", the only location of "agency", that is, of making decisions and taking action[2]. To question such a basic idea of the dominant global culture under neoliberal-communicative capitalism is like taking the 'red pill' in The Matrix. The effects of questioning individualism are almost traumatic, in its destabilisation of the basic concepts according to which how most of us function.

A few examples from popular culture might help to illustrate. In Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979), the titular reluctant Messiah attempts to disperse his following: "You've all got to work it out for yourselves! You're all individuals!" The crowd misses the point and obediently chants: YES! WE'RE ALL INDIVIDUALS! "I'm not," mutters an isolated and defeated-sounding voice, who is promptly hushed by the crowd. Brian of Nazareth, as a hapless Everyman character, is simply giving his unwanted fan-club a dose of "common sense". Common sense is, of course, what tells you the earth is flat, or as Gramsci would put it, "the embedded, incoherent and spontaneous beliefs and assumptions characterizing the conformist thinking of the mass of people in a given social order."[3] To be perfectly blunt about it, and to use the jargon ofconspiracy theory – common sense is what they want you to believe.

The popular culture my generation grew up with told us not only that we are all individuals, but that we have to be individuals. And if we're not individual enough, we'll be forced to be individuals – because being part of a crowd, or a collective, is scary, bad and wrong. In the 1990s science fiction TV show Star Trek: Voyager, the major antagonists for the crew of the Voyager, lost on the far side of the galaxy, are the Borg, a single "hive mind" which technologically assimilates any species unfortunate enough to cross their path. The crew of the Voyager encounter a human assimilated by the Borg (known by the designation "Seven of Nine") and set about trying to sever her ties to the collective. Seven at first fiercely resists any attempt to render or re-render her an individual, angrily asserting in the Borg plural: "we do not want to be what you are"[4]. But Seven of Nine has to be what the crew of Voyager are – ALL INDIVIDUALS – and eventually she learns to love it.

The ideology of neoliberal communicative capitalism is that we have to be forced to be individuals, if necessary, because individuals are good, kind, and intelligent, whereas crowds – or collectives – are brutish dumb beasts. "A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals," says Agent K from Men in Black (1997), justifying his agency's totalitarian practice of mind-wiping any ordinary person who learns the truth about aliens. "The intelligence of that creature known as a crowd is the square root of the number of people in

it," says the late Sir Terry Pratchett in Jingo – also published in 1997. You'd be forgiven for thinking that there was something about the atmosphere of the mid-1990s which encouraged our popular culture icons to remind us over and over again that not only are we individuals, but that we have to be individuals, because otherwise we become less than human.

And indeed there was – the triumph of neoliberalism, fresh on the defeat and collapse of what called itself Communism in Eastern Europe. The crowd, or the mob, or the Collective – the opposite of individuality – becomes something like the spectre of Communism – it is impossible, oppressive, evil, stupid, and yet continuously threatening, like the Borg, or today's bogeyman, the Islamist terrorist. "Collectivity is undesirable and collectivity is impossible," is how Dean phrases the message (p. 67).

When something is impossible and at the same time a continuous threat, you know there's something psychological going on for the people who're telling the story. Like the old cliché of homophobia being a defence against one's own queer desires, our popular culture wouldn't be so invested in telling us that we were all self-reliant individuals if we really were. Despite the stories of Robinson Crusoe or Ayn Rand, there is in fact no such thing as an isolated individual. Every individual comes out of a network of social connections, and can only survive or make sense of the world due to relationships with other human beings. But it is in both the nature and the interests of capitalism to obscure this truth.

At the economic level, Karl Marx pointed out 150 years ago that the secret of capitalist economics is the appropriation of the fruits of collective labour by individuals, to which we might add the appropriation of the natural resources of first the peasantry in Europe, and then the indigenous people of the planet. And indeed, Dean backs up her argument that "the individual... is a form of capture" (p. 75) by reference to both the clearances of peasants from their historical land (rendering them proletarians) and enslaved Africans being separated from their families, cultures and their languages by the slavers, who gave them new identities. Tellingly, Dean quotes Sigmund Freud's "identification of the group mind with the mind of primitive people" (p. 101).

In opposition to older forms of capitalism – which propped up traditional forms of authority such as the Church or the nuclear family to impose discipline on the masses – neoliberal-communicative capitalism actively seeks to promote extreme individualism, to the extent of anti-social behaviour, at all levels of society. In the language of Jacques Lacan's psychology, Dean refers to this as the collapse of "symbolic authority" (p. 40). The only social ties left in the imaginary capitalist utopia are market relationships – money changing hands. No family,

no whanau, no whakapapa, just the individual emerging as if from nowhere, trading with other such monsters in hard currency. The French socialist Daniel Bensaïd (quoted by Dean) acutely grasped the problem of being "forced to be free", writing in 2002:

Today we are confronted with a different form of … totalitarianism, the human face of market tyranny. Here politics finds itself crushed between the order of the financial markets – which is made to seem natural – and the moralising prescriptions of ventriloquist capitalism. The end of politics and the end of history then coincide in the infernal repetition of the eternity of the commodity, in which echo the toneless voices of Fukuyama and Furet: 'The idea of another society has become almost impossible to conceive of, and no one in the world today is offering any advice on the subject. Here we are, condemned to live in the world as it is.'[5]

In a fascinating section (pp. 36-50) Dean analyses how the narcissistic individual of the 1970s "me" generation has become the psychotic "survivor" mentality of the modern era, for whom the idea of society, of "other people", no longer even appears as a possible source of support, but as a continuous threat of destruction – hence, perhaps, the popularity of both conspiracy theory and zombie movies. I've known white libertarians to blithely assert that, unlike such inferior specimens as Muslims or Māori, they "have no culture". This is a statement of denial and wishful thinking as breath-taking as, for example, claiming that gravity has no effect on you and you simply choose not to float into space. Dean's statement that "Individualism is today less an indication of narcissism than it is of psychosis"[6] (p. 32) makes perfect sense in response to such assertions.

But this kind of arrogant contempt for anything outside one's own ego is precisely the ideal to which neoliberalism wants us all to aspire. We are forced to be free, in part, by aggressive shaming of any expression of weakness or dependency. This is the culture in which an employer, with their bare face hanging out, can say something like: "To give my employees job security would be to disempower them and relieve them of the responsibility that they need to feel for their own success" (p. 48).

I was once at an election meeting where the candidate for the neo-liberal ACT party was a former left-wing trade union official. He made a speech in which he explained that he used to be a socialist because he thought the world should be nice (word absolutely dripping with sarcasm, in the original) but now he realised the world wasn't nice at all. The conservative audience lapped it up. It was a narrative of ideological conversion, like a "come to Jesus" moment in a Bible-thumping church. Actually, the meeting was being held in a church, which added to the surreality of the moment.

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5   https://www.marxists.org/archive/bensaid/2002/07/leaps.htm

6   *Dean uses "psychosis" in its technical definition within Jacques Lacan's psychology, rather than its slang connotation of severe mental illness, as a mental state characterised by foreclosure, that is, the exclusion from consciousness of one whole segment of reality. It's interested to note that*

To be an individual under neoliberalism means to be either successful in the market, or to humbly take total responsibility for your own lack of success. Thus the individual becomes a full and accepted member of society – rather than a "whinger" or a "bludger", part of the surplus population towards whom apathy and even cruelty are not only tolerated, but promoted. As Dean puts it, "capitalist processes simultaneously promote the individual as the primary unit of capitalism and unravel the institutions of solidaristic support on which this unit depends" (p. 32) Some people report being abused by strangers on the street for giving money to the homeless. Internet reports on demonstrations and strikes often attract comments demanding violence towards protestors or anyone who impedes the normal functioning of consumers or obedient workers – or delightedly cheering any violence that does happen.[7]

And if you have "what it takes" to succeed in the dog-eat- cat world of The Market, then by that very factor you will be celebrated, no matter how boorish, antisocial or narcissistic you become (you may even become a candidate for President of the United States). On the other hand, to be dependent, to have needs and desires which can't be fulfilled in the marketplace, is treated as a shameful, childish, reluctance to abide by civilised norms. We see this very clearly in the "psychologization or medicalization of poverty" promoted by WINZ and other social welfare systems[8]. Forms of psychology which focus on "repairing" an individual so that they can play their allotted role as consumer and worker in the capitalist economy encourage us all to "take responsibility", by which they mean blame, for the way in which neoliberal life exhausts us and causes violence upon our very nature:

People respond to overload with drugs and technology, trying to do more, be more, keep up and on top, but the pressure is relentless. … Drugs, depression, ADHD and panic are not merely pathologies. They are also defences. The real pathology is the individual form itself. Drugs attempt to maintain it, keep it going… in a reflexive inward turn that breaks connections and weakens collective strength. The individual form is not under threat. It is the threat. And now it's weakening. (pp. 56-7)

Yet another, more concrete, way in which we are "forced to be free" is by debt (whether in the form of consumer debt, student loans, welfare loans). You know you're an individual when there is a bill with your name on it that you and only you must pay, or forfeit your possessions or some of your basic rights as a citizen. Debt plays the role that older forms of symbolic authority took in earlier forms of capitalism, becoming the major control on how you live your life – "it would be horrible to think all that debt was for nothing". (p.56) Individuality for working people under neoliberalism quickly becomes less an opportunity for self-actualization and

7   *See China Miéville, "On Social Sadism", http://salvage.zone/in-print/on- social-sadism/*

following your bliss than it becomes an intolerable burden. And then we wonder why suicide rates go up.

Fundamentally, the overwhelming social agreement that we not only are but all must be individuals is a recipe for not just social misery but political paralysis. Dean's book begins with a vignette from the glory days of Occupy Wall Street in 2011, where a "tall, thin, young man... with a revolutionary look" persuades the assembled crowd not to take collective action. "Each person has to make their own autonomous decision. No-one can decide for you. You have to decide for yourself." (p. 3) It's like that scene from Life of Brian quoted above come to life. And of course after this intervention, nothing happens, like a balloon which had been inflating was just deliberately punctured.

Compulsory individualism makes sure that nothing ever changes, nothing ever happens. The injunction to "work it out for yourselves" destroys symbolic authority within society, to the point where the individual subject "feels this now-missing authority to be all the closer, more powerful and intrusive. In a psychotic culture, then, mistrust is pervasive, all-consuming." (p. 49) And that's where conspiracy theories come from.

2. ... for the madness of crowds

Is it even possible, in the current era, to assert an alternative "subject" – that is, an alternative viewpoint from which to express desire and take action – from the individual? Is it anything more than a comical oxymoron to be able to disagree with the crowd yelling WE ARE ALL INDIVIDUALS, to be able to say to the heroic figures of individuality in our culture and in our political discourse, "we do not want to be what you are?"

Dean's political argument starts from the concept of the crowd – that is, a specific mass of people gathering together in a public space. This might be a celebration, or a mosh-pit, or the terraces at a big sporting event. It could be Occupy Wall Street or the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo which led to the downfall of Egypt's Mubarak dictatorship. Or... it could be a Donald Trump rally, or a racist lynch mob. Dean lays out her concept early on:

The crowd does not have a politics. It is the opportunity for politics. The determination whether a crowd was a mob or the people results from political struggle... The crowd is not a community. It doesn't rely on traditions. It doesn't have a history.... the crowd is a temporary collective being. (pp. 8-9)

Dean's crowd, crucially, also "comes together for the sake of an absolute equality" which she calls, following sociologist Elias Canetti, the discharge (p. 6) – when "all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal" (p. 120). This is the foundation of a "provisional collective being", argues Dean (p. 11), "the presence of many that opens us to collectivity and relieves us of anxiety" (p. 64-5). The crowd is therefore not only an objective reality (something outsiders can see) but a subjective reality, which "works back" on the consciousness of the individuals who comprise it (p. 197).

But what of the traditional view of the revolutionary subject among Marxists – that of the working class organised in the workplaces, in trade unions or revolutionary Soviets? The obvious point is that, while class is still (and increasingly so) an objective reality in modern globalised capitalism (though the forms the various classes take have changed) decades of sustained neoliberal ideological assault have smashed the institutions through which the working classes (in Western countries, anyway) knew themselves, and destroyed the subjective experience of class-consciousness for the vast majority of workers. Dean emphasises, though, that this has not changed the importance of class, but the way that class consciousness of the future will be experienced:

We should not expect class struggle in communicative capitalism to manifest primarily as workplace struggles. Communicative production take place throughout the social field... Student, debt, housing, and education protests need to be understood in terms of the class politics of those encountering proletarianization, not as separate and specific issue-based politics..

…Occupiers were always on their phones uploading video and tweeting and all the rest: for some contingent and mobile workers, the park is a workplace. Phones are means of production. When they occupy, communicating activists put these means of production to a use of their own choosing, not capital's (although capital can still expropriate their content and metadata). (pp. 19-20)

In other words: the modern techno-prole carries their workplace with them. The cutting edge of workers' power in the 1930s was the "sit-down strike", that is, the factory occupation. For information workers to become a crowd and to Occupy is the same thing, only more mobile, and happening right in the heart of the most important places of capitalist commerce and symbolic power:

The crowds and riots of the last decade … are protests of the class of those proletarianized under communicative capitalism.... They are fronts in global communicative capitalism's class

war, revolts of those whose communicative activities generate value that is expropriated from them. (p. 16)

"Particularly satisfying [to the crowd] is the destruction of boundaries", writes Dean (p. 122) – classic examples of these could be McDonald's storefront windows or the Berlin Wall. To become part of a crowd is to become part of an actually existing, rather than abstract, greater-than- individual subject – a concrete experience of not being an individual. Crucially, crowds gather

out of doors... requir[ing] an extra effort of overcoming isolation, leaving home or work, remaining outside, and merging with crowds of strangers... The surprise of their collectivity pushes against the expectations of disconnected consumption and screen-gazing that are so much a part of early twenty-first century sociality. (p. 22)

The very fact that crowds amass, that the people can be seen as having left their proper place, disrupts one social order and creates the possibility of another. (p. 116)

Almost off-hand, Dean also suggests that crowds might gather in virtual space (so there's an option for the agoraphobic and the cyber-hermit.); that the online equivalent of a crowd might be "Twitter mobs" united under the "common name" of the hashtag (pp. 123-4). Crucially in this context, she also states that "anonymity marks the de-individuation necessary for collective subjectivity", as Dean remarks (p. 142). Given all that, it's amazing that Dean doesn't discuss the internet phenomenon known as "Anonymous". Originating as an in-joke on the 4chan discussion board, individuals acting under the banner of "Anonymous" moved from carrying out minor pranks to carrying out major acts of "hacktivism" which unnerved the various state and corporate apparatuses to the point where it was infiltrated and many leading members sentenced to long prison terms.

"Anon" is in my opinion a concrete example of the digital version of Dean's "crowd" formation[9].. But – as Dean repeatedly explains – the crowd in and of itself has no politics. The energy of the crowd can always be appropriated by forces "antithetical to equality and collectivity" (p. 131). Thus, actions under the Anonymous banner have been carried out in the name of progressive politics, reactionary mob violence, and all libertarian flavours of activism in between. It requires self-conscious political struggle and intervention to turn crowd consciousness into class consciousness or revolutionary consciousness – a struggle which has to be carried out mostly in retrospect, in terms of discussion and debate about the meaning of the crowd-event.

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9   *Anyone who describes Anonymous as a "group" or a "network" doesn't know what they're talking about. I would have called it a "meme" or a "flag of convenience" – but in essence it was always a digital version of Dean's protean, transgressive, politically open crowd.*

"There is no politics until a meaning is announced and the struggle over this meaning begins." (p. 125)[10] And the subject of this struggle within the crowd, for the possibilities of the crowd, is how Dean begins to discuss the concept of the Party.

3. Who is this Lacan person, anyway?

How do we get from the crowd to the (new, Communist) Party, then? Well, dear reader, that's where it gets tricky, and somewhat French. To understand Dean's central argument in Crowds and Party you need to have some familiarity with the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan, whose project was to "systematize" the psychology of Sigmund Freud, is one of those "easy targets" of modern academic writing. His works are notoriously difficult to understand, even in the original French – which was precisely Lacan's expressed intent, in order to make his readers "work" to grasp the author's nuggets of wisdom. For every radical cultural theorist who finds his ideas useful in trying to understand how human beings function and how our consciousness contradicts itself (for example, Slavoj Žižek), another would agree with Noam Chomsky that Lacan was an "affable charlatan" – a con-man who sold meaningless but deep-sounding jargon, something like a French version of L. Ron Hubbard. In any case, since Dean bases her argument on Lacan's categories, we'll take them seriously for the purpose of this review.[11]

Crucially, unlike the forms of cognitive psychology mentioned above which in actual practice are often pressed into the service of shaming and cajoling someone into being a "functioning" individual in the capitalist marketplace, Lacan's psychoanalysis is "built around the failures of the individual form" (p. 87) – that the way we come into being as individuals is "always-already" flawed and lacking. Lacan's understanding of how psychoanalysis works is based on the concept of transference, an idea from Freud which is maybe better known as "projection". The "analysand" (patient or client) cannot deal with or even acknowledge their own unconscious thoughts, fantasies and struggles except by projecting them onto the analyst (doctor, counsellor). To give a clichéd example, repressed hostility to one's parents might manifest itself in the psychoanalytic session as hostility to the analyst. A wise analyst will, of course, not take this personally – once these feelings are out in the open, they can be dealt with.

The job of a Lacanian analyst is therefore not to "do" anything, not to offer advice or meanings. Their job is to, in the words of two other writers on Lacan's psychology "fill the space people give to all imaginary sources of knowledge and help" (Stephen Frosh), or to "occupy

10   The fact that the "struggle for meaning" never has a guaranteed or obvious outcome is emphasised by Dean in her discussion of the debates around the meaning of the Paris Commune (pp. 130-2). In the US, for example, it was often seen through the lens of the recently-ended Civil War, as an example of local secession from central government – and in those terms gained the support of none other than Alexander Stephenson, the vocal champion of slavery who had been Vice-Presi-

the space of or stand in… for the unconscious – to make the unconscious present through his or her presence" (Bruce Fink). The analyst's mere presence, providing a sort of "screen" onto which the analysand can project their inner conflicts, holds open the possibility of the analysand helping his/herself.

"Of course, the party is not an analytical session," Dean admits. "Leaders and cadres are not psychoanalysts. This does not mean, however, that something like transference is not at work." (p. 184) Dean is thus arguing that the (Communist) Party acts as a "stand-in" for her politicised crowd in the same way that the Lacanian analyst does – the Party "holds open a gap in our setting so as to enable a collective desire for collectivity" (p. 6).

Again like the Lacanian analyst, the Party, in Dean's conception, acts for the crowd as "the subject supposed to know and the subject supposed to believe" (p. 186) – the symbolic sources of legitimacy without which knowledge or belief are impossible. In Lacan's psycho-analysis, the analysand's willingness to discover hidden knowledge about themselves is made possible by the belief that the analyst already knows it (even though they actually do not). Similarly, Dean follows Žižek in arguing that, in general, "the belief embodied in 'social things'" is impossible unless we convince ourselves that the Other also believes it" (p. 188). Ideas like democracy, law, and justice can only function as social beliefs if we are confident that others also believe in them; without faith in the "subject supposed to believe" in these things (whether society, or the Government, or even God), we are forced into an antisocial "might-makes- right" position in sheer self-defence. As explored in Part I, the "psychotic individualism" of modern neoliberal capitalism increasingly does do away with the symbolic authority of such ideas.

As Dean continually repeats, the crowd has no politics in and of itself, and no essential meaning (though it has concrete existence). Any meaning, or politics, for the crowd-event has to be created in retrospect through political struggle. Dean's crucial argument is that the role of the Party is to create a "transference" relationship with the crowd, as a Lacanian analyst does with the analysand; it "holds open the gap through which the people appear as the politi-cal subject" (p. 28), emphasis added). "The people" is a crucial category which Dean borrows from the Marxist tradition through Lenin and Mao as meaning "the revolutionary alliance of the oppressed" (p. 28) – in their day this meant the industrial working class and the peasant-ry, but of course today we can add a much wider array of the different social forces thrown up by the churn of neoliberal-communicative capitalism.

The crowd is thus not seen as the embodiment of or substitute for the proletariat, or the

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dent of the Confederate States.

11   *It helped me massively that I read two excellent "Lacan for Dummies" books by the American psychiatrist Bruce Fink before I grappled with Dean.*

working class, but as potentially signifying the common interests of all those social forces up at the sharp end of communicative capitalism. A crowd which does not become "the people" (either self-consciously at the time, or in retrospect) might just be a celebration, or may be a baleful, antisocial mob. "The people as subject is neither crowd nor party but between them", Dean explains later (p. 157) – or, we might put it another way, the people is a relationship between Party and crowd. The people are for Dean the primary political subject – the bearer of agency, the collective being which is able to do things and make decisions in the world of politics. A crowd as a "temporary collective being" cannot be self-conscious or permanent enough to be a political subject; conversely, for the Party to see itself as the political subject which will change the world is the fatal error known as "substitutionism", of which more later. The people as subject becomes "the gap in the structure" of the capitalist world order (p. 88) which brings in the possibility of choice, action and change to disrupt the endless circle of cause-and- effect and challenge the very rules of the game.

But most crucially, the people do not exist in advance of the revolutionary event, but are "produced" by it "as its cause" (p. 151). "Whether this push will have been an emancipatory egalitarian expression of the people as a collective political subject depends on the party. The crowd is not the people." (p. 115) The role of the Party is to "find the people in the crowd", as it were; subsequently, "the party has to defend this declaration in a hostile setting. Even more, it has to ensure its truth" (p. 217). Dean devotes several pages to discussing how Karl Marx's famous work The Civil War in France retrospectively identified the Paris Commune uprising as an act of "the revolutionary people" and of "our party" – an explanation which was in no way obvious or guaranteed.[12]

So, if I might be permitted to try to sum up this knotty thread of argument: What Dean is saying through her Lacanian metaphor is that *the Communist Party becomes a "screen" or "mirror" which reflects the crowd back onto itself, enabling it to begin reflecting upon and resolving its own internal conflicts*. The Party, as the subject of communism, argues for the crowd-event as a manifestation of "the people", the alliance of all those exploited and oppressed, against alternative interpretations. And it defends this declaration even after the crowd has dispersed.

The crowd becoming the people is thus only a possibility because of the Party's argument for this to happen, in which it preserves the desire of the best elements in the crowd itself; the Party's role is "to arrange the intensity unleashed by the crowd, to keep it present as fervent desire." (p. 158). Of course, this crucially means that the Party has to separate itself from the crowd, to become a mirror from which the greater totality can be reflected back; the people

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12   *Notice the italicised words in the future perfect tense. The work of the Party to find the people in the crowd works, as noted above re: Marx and the Paris Commune, backwards in time. Spooky, huh?*

13   *One question raised by Dean's metaphor between psychoanalysis and the Party's work in the crowd is: why should the crowd begin to have this "transference relationship with the party"?*

as a subject only comes into existence out of a dialectical process between Party and crowd. (More on the contradiction between Party and crowd, few and many, leaders and led, later.) [13]

In this process of coming to see itself as "the people", the crowd transfers its own wishes, hopes, dreams, frustrations and inner conflicts onto the Party. But in turn, the Party must therefore have "fidelity to the equality of the crowd discharge" (p. 200) – rather than, for example, coming to see itself as the agent of change. It "holds open" the space where the radical equality which is such an essential part of the crowd experience can be remembered after the fact:

This persistence [of the subject] needs a body, a carrier. Without a carrier, it dissipates into the manifold of potentiality. Nevertheless, with a carrier some potentiality is diminished… Political forms… situate themselves within this division. (p. 183)

The party doesn't know. It organizes a transferential space offering the position of the subject supposed to know. (p. 199)

The Communist Party derives its energy from the crowd as it strives to find ways to let the crowd endure, to enable its intensity to be felt even after the crowd has dispersed. It provides a transferential object that can stand in for the crowd. (p. 242)

This might be seen as an extension of the Marxist tradition that the Party is the memory[14] or the university[15] of the labour movement. The Party carries the belief that "the crowd can become the people" between crowd-events. Like the Lacanian analyst pestering the analysand for more and more frequent analysis, the Party keeps the desire "lit" for the emergence of the people as a revolutionary political subject.

Because, as the Lacanian slogan goes, desire is the desire of the Other; we want because the Other wants. For example, Bruce Fink advises Lacanian analysts to continually encourage their analysands to keep coming to analysis – more and more often if at all possible. The analyst's desire thus creates the transference relationship which keeps the analysand's desire "lit", as it were. I don't think Dean goes into detail, but it seems that in her conception it is the Party's continued expression of its desire that the crowd should become the people which establishes the transference relationship. But this assumes that the crowd is interested in or even aware of what the Party has to say in the first place. How and why the crowd decides to begin to pay attention to the party seems to be the missing link at the beginning of the chain – something of a "chicken and egg" problem. To turn the metaphor around, Lacanian analysts don't just turn up at the house of potential clients with leaflets.

14   *See for example Leon Trotsky: https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch08.htm*

15   *See for example http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2000s/2004/no- 1198-june-2004/university-working- class*

4. In Soviet Russia, The Party Forms You

A central part of Dean's argument is the importance of

*the affective **dimension of the party** [emphasis added, which] knots together unconscious processes across a differential field to enable a communist political subjectivity... these processes [are] the effects of collectivity back on itself... the psychodynamics of the party. (p. 28)*

If you're a bit put off by the long words in that quote, what Dean is talking about is the way people are changed by being part of a Communist party, beginning to see themselves as a collective political subject.[16] As she expresses it later, the party "must also be thought in terms of the subjectivization of the people and their process as the subject of a politics." (p. 155)

In her final chapter, Dean examines in detail the accounts of ordinary rank-and- file members of the Communist Parties of the USA and of Great Britain, from the 1930s to the 1980s, of how being part of "the Party" created not only individual self-consciousness but collective forms of responsibility and accountability among their members. In part, this means the party members learning to see themselves as party members, and to see themselves from the perspective of the Party – crucially, to see themselves as a collective subject capable of taking meaningful political action.

The formation of such a political subject is necessarily optimistic – in fact, over-optimistic, in the sense of being willing to move and take risks which are not, by the rational standards of capitalist normality, justified:

The certainty of the political subject – we will win – is always too soon, an anticipation of results it cannot guarantee but pursues nonetheless… To disrupt and surprise, subjectivization has to come too soon. It can't be predicted, expected, or natural, for that would mean that it remained within the order of things (pp. 147-8).

Dean's discussion of the French Communist writer Louis Althusser's idea of "interpellation" is probably a bit more abstract than your general audience is looking for (although if you're familiar with Althusser's work already, it's fascinating and well worth the time). But one crucial part of her critique of Althusser – in which she more or less turns his argument "upside down" – is in the question of rituals and routines. Althusser argued that "belief" was a matter of practice – to put it one way, if you kneel down and pray every day, eventually you will start believing in God.

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16   *In my review of Spiller, Barclay-Kerr and Panoho's Wayfinding Leadership for a Fightback internal discussion document, I argued that "building a communist movement, and the personal and political development of comrades [should be seen] as two sides of the same coin." (https://fight-backvoices.wordpress.com/2015/11/07/building-the- waka-suggestions- for- organisation-from-maori-leadership- traditions/) I'm choosing to believe that Dean and I are talking about the same*

But Dean, who wants to correct what she sees as Althusser's concessions to individual-ism, points out that such practices are always group practices – the signs of belonging to a collective, in the example given a religious community (p. 113-14). Accordingly, she puts great emphasis in what those of us who were trained in Leninist sects used to call "establishing a routine". Through regular political practices which assume that great breakthroughs are possi-ble, the Party "endeavours to arrange the intensity unleashed by the crowd, to keep it present as fervent desire" (p. 158). The "ceaseless activity" of CPUSA members "was the practical optimism that sustained the vision" (p. 228) while the Party's obsessive need to check up on its activities and its members was manifested as "a positive mania for reports" (p. 224). The upshot of this was that:

Consistent activity – particularly the planning, meetings and reports – generated the perspective of the Party that enabled it. Consistency made it possible for the everyday to feel momentous… Organization concentrated collective sentiment into a form other than the deprivations of capital and state, enabling people to see themselves and the world from the perspective of a gap in the given, a gap of hope and possibility. (p. 228).

This is all part of what Dean sees as the formation of a collective subject: "something is happening such that the capacity to say 'I' is being replaced by the will to say 'we'" (p. 141). In a crucial passage, Dean explains the ideas from Lacan and Freud's psychology of the ideal ego [the subject's idealised self-image], the ego ideal [the agency whose ideals the ideal ego is trying live up to – one's parents, society, God, the "Big Other"], and the superego [the inner voice which accuses and punishes the subject for failing and disappointing the ego ideal]. What Dean is arguing is that the formation of a collective subject means that these three inner psychic functions are reformed with the Party becoming the "Big Other":

The ideal ego in communist parties is typically imagined in terms of the good comrade… In contrast, the ego ideal is the point from which comradeship is assessed… The party superego incessantly charges us for failing on all fronts, we never do enough, even as it taunts us with the sacrifices we make for the sake of the party, we have always done too much. (p. 189)

The word "Party", for its members, comes to "name a common interior force… The sense of what [a member] must do was the same as the sense of what the Party could do." (p. 235) Feelings of pressure and anxiety among members about whether they are "doing enough" are therefore a positive for Dean, a sign of the formation of the collective subject:

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kind of thing here.

The knot of unconscious processes that holds open the space for communist political sub-jectivity exerts constant, even unrealizable demands… The stronger the political organization we build, the greater will be its – and our – expectations…. It is the apparatus through which we compel ourselves to do what we must. (p. 210)

In debates among 1930 CPUSA members on recruitment, the members' worries that the party is "not doing enough" to recruit (or, alternatively, trying to do too much and alienating the workers) show the "superegoic dimension" of Party discourse – "every victory – in true superegoic fashion – inspires yet more self-criticism" (pp. 192-3) Dean points approvingly to the complaint of one member in the face of these constantly increasing demands that "I am just as much a Communist as ever, but I am not 10 communists" (p. 195) as evidence that Party members are beginning to see themselves as multiples, as a collective:

The production of the collective space of the party as a knot of transferential effects is the way people are changed through struggle… Members look at themselves and their interactions from the perspective of the association they create through their association, the party. (p. 203)

Belonging to the Party made its working class, often racially excluded and poorly educated members "somebody" that they weren't before – and, most significantly, gave their daily lives and activity meaning. "Members were more than members. They had practical positions and responsibilities far beyond those given to them by their place in capitalism" (p. 224). Constant meetings "transformed a group of people having a pint in the pub into the Communist Party" (p. 225). In the CPs, "one was somebody because one mattered to the collective… To be somebody was to be accountable and to be accountable was to feel the moral pressure of the collective. The Party expected members to do what they said they were going to do." (pp. 236-7) Dean quotes one Communist veteran who forced herself to go through the hated task of selling the Party paper:

"because if I didn't do it, I couldn't face my comrades the next day … They say to us, 'The Communist Party held a whip over you.' They don't understand. The whip was inside each of us, we held it over ourselves, not each other." (p. 234)

The importance given to Party-related affairs over other aspects of the members' lives eventually reached the point where the Party almost became its own, self-contained world:

"None of us considered the work we did on the 'outside' important… You were living in a bourgeois capitalist world where everything was shit, everything fed a single purpose, so what did it matter what you did. Your real life was with the Party" (A CPUSA veteran, p. 244)

In fact, for the CPs to keep the desire of their members kindled going required a potent combination of organisation and fantasy:

Organization is not just a matter of bureaucracy and control. It's a generator of enthusiasm, an apparatus of intensification that ruptures the everyday by breaking with spontaneism. Organization had a fantastic dimension, buttressing illusions of control, expressing dreams of power and efficacy as capable of being fulfilled… To the extent that organization enabled members of the CPGB to imagine their Party as shaping the world, they could believe in what they were doing whether or not their rallies and Daily Worker headlines corresponded to any actually significant political influence. (pp. 225-7)

This is frankly the part of the book where Dean's argument began to unnerve me. Dean says that "the Party provided an affective structure that didn't allow people to give in to their shallower desires and, in so doing, brought out the best in them." (p. 233) But it wasn't always the best. The elephant in the room is that this was a Stalinised Communist Party, whose leadership was being directed at the whims of the Russian ruling elite, inevitably forced to betray its own origins out of the egalitarian crowd discharge – and their leadership was in fact prepared to lie to them to keep them enthusiastic. A group subject is being formed, yes. Collective labour becomes possible which was not possible before. But to what end? Who profits from the surplus created by this physical and emotional labour?

Dean quotes at great length from the "trial" of a 1930s CPUSA comrade by the name of Ross, to show how Ross's accusers direct their claims that he has betrayed the Party, and how Ross himself accepts his culpability to the Party as "big Other". What you might not understand unless you read carefully was that Ross was innocent of the charges against him ("the Chicago comrades were wrong" – p. 246).[17] To betray the Party is to betray one's own desire for the communist future, and betraying one's own desire is, for Lacan, the only real crime (p. 238). But in Dean's own terms, the trial of Ross isn't the Party encouraging the crowd to become the people rather than a lynch mob. This is the Party as a lynch mob.

Dean argues strongly that the collective strength of the Party is a two-edged sword:

The ugliness of the Party is the other side of its service as a transferential object, its capacity to make the crowd felt after its dissipation. … Glory and horror are the same arrangement of intensity from two perspectives, the profound feeling of collective strength and the fear such strength can generate. (p. 247)

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17   It is said that Nikolai Bukharin, the last of the "Old Bolshevik" leadership to be executed by Stalin, went along with his own show-trial for the sake of not betraying The Party. For those steeped in the backstory of the Aotearoa/NZ left, the trial of Ross might also bring to mind the infamous 1979 trial of Bill Logan by the Spartacist League. The "Sparts" have been refreshingly frank in their literature that public spectacles like these form the function of cohering their group against a common enemy.

The Party becoming a vampiric monster rather than a Captain Planet-style "combination of our powers" is always a risk. There is no such thing as a sure thing or a free lunch. In any case, Dean argues we can't abolish the spectre of the oppressive, cultish party by abolishing the party. For her, the negative, punishing "superego" of the political activist doesn't go away if there's no Party to embody it; on the contrary, that it has is in fact become more dangerous and destructive in the current fragmented scene:

Indeed, all the superegoic effects of righteous injunction seem all the more intense precisely because there is no party that can anchor them, no program to which one might appeal for justification and relief. Circulating as insults and directives in social media, these effects rage as an incessant urge to police and punish, whipping the Left into the frenzy of its own failure. (p. 219)[18]

Dean's argument is that despite the betrayals and political blunders of the leadership, the creation of the Communist Party as a collective subject gave its members strength to live their lives and to bring about change under conditions of capitalist oppression. Here is an account of a "CP-organized block committee" confronting a judge to get food relief for the hungry:

The workers appear as a crowd, a roaring steadfast wall. Their appearing compels the police to take the perspective of the CP and recognize that the united workers are stronger than any judge and his order. (pp. 190-1)

Similarly, I'm sure that comrade Ian A. would forgive me if I didn't mention the heart-warming account contained on pp. 208-10, of a young Communist woman confronting her authoritarian father: the takeaway line is "I felt like the whole Communist Party was right there in the room with me." (p. 210-13). And of course this was a slogan of the German Communists – wo ein Genosse ist, da ist die Partei ("where one comrade is, there is the party")[19].

From the point of view of the neoliberal popular-culture imaginary we discussed in Part 1, to be willing to say "we" instead of "I" is the worst thing imaginable. This is the Reagan/Thatcher conception of collectivity as an "instrument of coercion, promoting uniformity rather than diversity, intimidating the individual, and subordinating the minority to the unthinking mass." (p. 222) Hence the rush to crow over the collapse of regimes or movements professing (no matter how sincerely) fidelity to communism or socialism as proof that it was wrong for them to even try, that any socialist country must end up as a dictatorship, and any socialist

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18   When Dean decries "the practices of calling out and shaming that undermine solidarity" in her discussion of the actually-existing Left (p. 256), one might ask what exactly is the difference between this and the railroading of Ross at his trial. Is the only difference the framework of "the Party" rather than the disembodied mass carrying out the judgement, blaming and punishment? It's difficult to imagine that the targets of the respective acts felt any real difference. Perhaps we should ask Bill Logan.

group or party must either inevitably betray or turn into an abusive, sadistic cult.

But some do, of course. The processes of collective subject formation which Dean describes have no essential moral or political value. They are not particular to a communist party or indeed any egalitarian group. The processes Dean describes of routinized, collective work where the individual learns to see himself through the eyes of the collective are also used by authoritarian groups such as religious cults.[20]

Dean happily concedes the appropriateness of the comparison of the CPGB and CPUSA in their heydays to "a secular religion woven out of ministry, self-sacrifice, faith, and unity." (p. 223) But where the Calvinist believes in religious salvation as the "payoff" for giving themselves over to the big Other, the Communist believes in the revolution, or at least the possibility of the revolution. As Dean explains it, "To be a communist is to go to meeting after meeting, to work hard, maybe even to remain poor, but it is also to have access to a force strong enough to go up against the law and win." (p. 213) "I had the Party and I had my comrades, and they made me strong, strong on my feet" says one veteran (p. 221). The crucial point is reciprocity: the members sacrifice themselves for the Party, build their identities around the Party and in return the Party holds open the psychic space for them to organise, fight and win. But when the Party betrays its responsibilities to the members – or to the people, or to the crowd, or to the revolution – we are in then in a situation of crisis and despair.

5. Jodi Dean vs. The Left

I think we can get the most out of Dean's arguments if we point out some very clear ways in which what she suggests goes against the accepted wisdom of the current radical Left – what she calls "left realism". Karl Marx said that in every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ideas of society, or, as Dean puts it, "even when we are fully conscious of the deep inequity of the system in which we find ourselves, we confirm and conform to the dominant ideology" (p. 71). And yet, many good upstanding socialists will be very offended if you suggest that something they are saying might be based on bourgeois or right-wing ideology. You certainly have to be prepared for the accusation to be thrown back at you, like an Iraqi journalist throwing a shoe at "Dubya" Bush. And hopefully you'll be honest enough to wear the shoe if it fits.

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19   In the declining years of the eastern German Stalinist state, this slogan was altered in jokes to read: "where one comrade is, there is a hard-currency shop." But Dean argues that attacks on corruption within the Party at least show that the Party's symbolic function is "the subject supposed to believe" (p. 190).

20   Just about any exposé of the Church of Scientology can demonstrate the abusive formation of a collective subject. Here's one way to start: http://www.mikerindersblog.org/fear-that- which-drives- the-church- of-scientology/

Something I often hear from comrades, many of whom came out of the post-1968 sect left, that one refreshing point of being an "individual activist" (if that wasn't already, in Dean's terms, a contradiction in terms), is the lack of "groupthink" – the pressure of the collectivity to adhere to some kind of line or opinion. "Groupthink" is a word which seems to[21] come straight out of George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, a novel embodying a left-wing commitment to individualism if there ever was one. And yet, Dean argues, when capitalists try to harness the power of crowds (in "crowdsourcing" and similar initiatives), they are careful to block "imitation and groupthink" – which, in fact, blocks "the affective binding-together of a provisional collective being" (p. 11). To reject groupthink is therefore to reject the collectivity which is the basis of communist orthodoxy:

When the Left echoes injunctions to individuality, when we emphasize unique perspectives and personal experiences, we function as vehicles for communicative capitalist ideology. 'Left' becomes nothing but a name on a bottle. (p. 35)

The argument against groupthink – that it blocks "progress" and "innovation" – is thus revealed as one based in the neoliberal assumption that these are preferable to the formation of a collective will and consciousness. And certainly this is true for capitalist-sponsored "smart mobs" and networking, which, Dean argue, are "engines for harnessing inequality rather than limiting it" (p. 13) – for encouraging one unique and special thought, individual or brand to stand out from and dominate the marketplace. This is certainly not what we want to happen if we are thinking of the party as a mass cohering together – the individualist "smart mob" "attempts to prevent the crowd from introducing a gap through which the people can appear" (p. 14). In contrast, "cascade effects, enthusiasm, bandwagoning, contagion and imitation", as notoriously occur in social media discussions, are precisely what should happen in the formation of a new collective consciousness. (p.15) You can't be a proper group without groupthink, to be blunt about it.

Dean is not surprised that such ideas are so dominant in the actually existing movement, given the downwardly-mobile role of the information workers who are increasingly at the forefront: "New proletarians often have a strong libertarian bent… They have a hard time uniting as a class even as their actions are the expressions of a class." (p. 21-2). However, she takes the trouble to rebut at length the arguments for "horizontalist" (leaderless) organisation, which she identifies as coming out of "post-anarchism" (the combination of anarchism and post-structuralist philosophy – p. 196). In the form of activism discussed by writers such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and John Holloway,

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21   *And yet, it doesn't. Groupthink is a word which fits with the rules of Orwell's fictional Newspeak, but – like doublespeak – was not one of those used by Orwell. One general rule of thumb is that when political discourse begins using Orwellian Newspeak, issues of strong anxiety about the individual faced with power have come to the fore. I myself like to use the authentically Orwellian word goodthinkful to mean "proudly and self-consciously conformist to dominant narratives", i.e.*

the goal becomes, as in communicative capitalism itself, the production of the many, the multitude of singularities.... There are small battles, policy options, and cultural interventions, victories that can be absorbed and defeats that can be forgotten... politics becomes passionately attached to the small and weak. (p. 25)

The extent to which such ideas have become the common sense of the radical left shows the overwhelming influence of neoliberal individualism, whereby even those of us who dream of a post-capitalist future jealously guard the individual as sovereign against a communist political collective. "Radical pluralists and participatory democrats sometimes imply that there can be left politics without judgment, condemnation, exclusion and discipline. Denying the way that collective power works back on those who generate it, they suggest we can have the benefits of collectivity without its effects." (p. 249)[22]

"Left realism is good on spontaneous outrage," argues Dean. "But it fails to organize itself in a way that can do something with this outrage." (p. 71) In contrast, Dean makes a strong argument for institutions, even bureaucracies, as "gaps" through which a political subject might appear: "Institutions are symbolic arrangements that organize and concentrate the social space. They 'fix' an Other." (p. 188) The kind of leaderless, libertarian collective conceived by John Holloway, "is at best a crowd," Dean argues; "it has no place from which it looks at itself…. [it] omits the function of the space of the Other." (p. 197) In other words, the "gap" through which the people might appear cannot open up without a Party or similar organisation attempting to engage the crowd in a transferential relationship – the Party cannot simply cheer the crowd on (or dismiss it) from a distance, but must try to gain its attention, to become the crowd's object of desire. The flip side of the appeal to every individual "working it out for itself" is obsessive calls for "unity" – for socialists, radicals, the popular movement to settle or at least stop arguing about their differences. But, as Dean points out, the whole basis for any kind of politics is because "the political subject is collective and because it is split" (p. 89). It is precisely through the split – the fact that there are what Maoists would call "contradictions among the people", that the revolutionary alliance of the oppressed is in fact an alliance between different forces with different interests and viewpoints and not a monolithic bloc – that the "gap" appears through which a collective subject embodying that alliance, holding fidelity to the absolute equality of the crowd "moment", can come to exist.

[John Holloway] is right to say the party is not the bearer of working-class consciousness. In fact, it never could be …. [The Party is in fact an] Other space doesn't have its own interest, a correct line, or an objective science that tells it the truth of history. It is instead a rupture within

the general state of mind of a stuff.co.nz comments box.

22   *This desire for "collectivity without collectivity" is reminiscent of those jokes that Slavoj Žižek tells about chocolate laxatives or decaffeinated coffee – a self-limiting (in Lacan's terms "hysterical") and therefore safe desire.*

the people dividing them from the givenness of their setting, a rupture that is an effect of their collectivity. (pp. 205-6)

For the Party to "hold this gap open" means precisely to insist on differences amid unity, to tease out all the ways in which "our side" disagrees with itself. Something to remember in the next Facebook flame-war, perhaps.

Thus, those of us who might want to perform political alchemy might ponder the magical maxim coagula et solve (dissolve and reform). But we also might want to consider the famous maxim: "as above so below". The macrocosm reappears in the microcosm; it seems to be a universal experience that the relationships between an organisation or Party and those outside it are inevitably mirrored in relationships within the organisation itself. Leon Trotsky spelt this out in 1904 with his critique of the Bolshevik Party's methods of operation. In Dean's summary: "the party substitutes itself for the class, the party organization substitutes itself for the class, the central committee substitutes itself for the party organization, and the leader substitutes him or herself for the party organization" (p. 258). [23]

But just as revolutionary politics requires a productive contradiction between Party and crowd, Dean argues that even within the Party or the movement, "political organisation of any sort entails a gap between the few and the many." (p. 166). More controversially for those with individualist presuppositions, Dean argues that scaling up organisation necessarily intensifies these divisions: "the larger the field, the greater becomes the inequality... between the one and the many" (p. 13) Dean repeats again and again that to imagine that we can have a Party without leaders and led, without professionals and rank-and- file, or without splinters and faction fighting is a retreat to "the fantasy of the beautiful moment" (p. 196):

Some degree of alienation is unavoidable: making something ourselves, building collectives, creating new institutions cannot eliminate the minimal difference between the collectivity and the people. (p. 90)

The substitutionism about which Trotsky warned is not a danger particular to communist or working-class parties. It's an unavoidable condition of any popular politics with emancipatory egalitarian ends. Neither people nor class … exist as a unity. (p. 134)

Communist parties – like the Left more broadly – are always sites of debate, argument, factions, and splintering. (p. 219)

Almost in passing, Dean deals with the question of individual leadership. Her crucial insight

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23   *The first step in the process would seem to indicate that the "original sin" is a philosophical or political misrecognition. It is only in a party which sees itself as replacing the people as the subject of history, rather than leaving the gap open for them, that a leadership group could emerge which sees itself as capable of replacing the Party. As Bertolt Brecht noted in 1953, the logical outcome of this kind of politics is a Government which dissolves the people and elects a new one.*

is that the leader can be the effect of the crowd – that the way in which the crowd comes to understand itself is as a common relationship to a leader:

The strengths of many become the imaginary attributes of one. The individual appears as the locus of a capacity for innovation and interruption that is only ever an effect of collectivities. (p. 113)

Crucially, the leader does not produce the collectivity, but the other way around.[24] The ideal relationship between party and crowd is replicated in the relationship of leader to crowd – the leader becomes a viewpoint from which, or a mirror in which, the crowd can see itself, as does the presence of bourgeois class-traitors within the communist movement (p. 180-1). Only with the "split" in the subject, as Lacan's psychology will have it, comes the possibility of self-consciousness and therefore change. However, it does not do to make a virtue of the necessity of contradiction; just because "the gap is unavoidable does not imply that any given instantiation of the gap is permanent or justified… [or that] doing more work should… imply garnering more material benefit." (p. 196) Some leaders are more faithful to the crowd's egalitarian discharge than others.

Again, this is often an area of unproductive head-butting among different factions of activists who debate their attitudes towards mass movements in terms of the personal qualities or individual political positions of their leaders – what Lacan would call an "imaginary" approach. If we take Dean's argument seriously, we will avoid both the "personality cult" where leaders become infallible and/or irreplaceable, or the "beautiful moment" belief that any "real" egalitarian movement will be leaderless and that any given leader is an obstacle or an enemy.[25]

6. Zombies!!! (The actually-existing "communist" "parties")

The kind of collective subject which the CPUSA and the CPGB embodied at their height – with all the "glory and horror" of the creation of a powerful Collective whose members say "we" instead of "I"[26] – is the kind of organisation which Dean enjoins us to build once again, for the 21 st century:

Crowds push back. From the perspective of the party, we see them as the insistent people. Fidelity to the insistence of the egalitarian discharge demands that we build the infrastructure capable of maintaining the gap of their desire. The more powerful the affective infrastructure

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24   *This may remind some of us of Trotsky's argument in History of the Russian Revolution which can be summarised as "the Revolution would not have happened without Lenin, but the Bolshevik Party made Lenin."*

25   *The masochistic can see this for themselves by watching any online debate between socialists arguing about the movements behind Jeremy Corbyn (UK) and Bernie Sanders (US).*

26   *Possibly not flying around in cubic spaceships, though.*

we create, the more we will feel its force, interiorizing the perspective of the many into the
ego-ideal that affirms our practices and activities and pushes us to do more than we think we
can. (p. 249)

Is this even possible, ask the sceptical, under current conditions of radical fragmentation and atomisation of the masses? The common slogans are: people don't want to join things. People don't want to commit. People don't want to come to meetings. And as explored about, Dean's model requires precisely this kind of routinized, communal work for the Party as collective subject to be formed. But such criticisms, Dean argues, "treat isolation, fragmentation and individualism as explanations for their own continuation":

Part of the oddity of the claim that there is no social basis for the party is the way it inverts
previous explanations for party identification. These explanations held that people join together
in parties not because they already feel connected to others but because they don't. (p. 204)

Dean explicitly and deliberately skirts the question of how a new communist party might look. She certainly doesn't carry a torch for any of the traditional "Leninist" methods of organization; in fact, in her conclusion she mentions "a global alliance of the radical Left" as almost equivalent to the kind of party she wants (p. 262). The main interest for her seems to be not what kind of institution should be built, but that something must be built to "mind the psychic gap" in the political setting.

Sadly, through her understandable wish to avoid getting bogged down into the mess of organizational deal, Dean avoids the necessity to grapple with some of the reasons why people might simply not want to collaborate in her processes of collective subject formation. In some cases, the answer is simple. We've done it before. And it damaged us, badly.

Working under conditions of exhaustion and illness, I confess that I didn't do the research required to answer the question: does Jodi Dean have any history in the various groups which have claimed to be "the Communist Party", or an embryonic form of it, or a group building towards establishing it – or, to use the pejorative description, "left-wing sects"? I think that this is quite a vital question in that her discussion of "the Party" seems to either be an abstract one, or based on the experience of the mass Western CPs of the Stalinist and post Stalinist periods. I would assume that Dean wants us to use her work to give us some hints about how to Build the Party!, as so many of our little sects used to heroically put it. But she runs up against psychic resistance if she neglects the experience of those of us who've tried – and failed – to do precisely that over decades.

Let's return to Dean's rejection of the neoliberal rejection of "groupthink" mentioned above. The question of how the party is to be organized and led is one which Dean deliberately and explicitly neglects. Again, I don't know whether Jodi Dean has any knowledge of how the actually-existing world of leftist sects operates. But it is my personal experience over that the central failure of all the major "Leninist" groups in the Anglophone countries has been the formation of an immovable leadership group[27], an "undeclared faction" to use the Leninist jargon, which happens to include pretty much all the influential leaders of the group, which identifies itself, its own political strategy and its personal networks with the party. This entails the emergence of "groupthink" within the leadership and its coherence as a collectivity with its own interests – a "party within the party", in other words. This undeclared leadership faction then identifies the rest of the party as an obstacle – or even "the enemy"[28] – and proceeds to essentially kill the Party by silencing, marginalising or expelling those who pose a threat to the leadership, or even seem likely to in the future. By "kill", I mean losing what Dean calls "fidelity to the equality of the crowd discharge" (p. 200) – that is, lose its reason to exist, to become self-contained, self- perpetuating, and no longer the "holder of the gap through which the people can appear".

This is of course "substitutionism", a danger in the centralised-party model which Leon Trotsky recognized in 1904 and which Jodi Dean also recognizes in the abstract (p. 134). But on the other hand, Dean goes on to strongly argue that pure "horizontality" or non-hierarchy is a mirage which makes effective politics impossible, trapping activists in "the fantasy of the beautiful moment". All political organisation, argues Dean, involves a contradiction between the few and the many, between the leader and the led (p. 166). Daniel Bensaïd would agree: "a certain degree of centralisation, far from being opposed to democracy, is the essential condition for it to exist".

However, the "Leninist" model followed by small Western groups in the post-1968 era has included certain common organizational features which almost guarantee that "the leadership" will become a party-within- the-party working for its own ends, rather than the kind of self-sacrificing servant leadership which attracts gratitude from the led (p. 177). One notorious example has been selecting the leadership as a unified "slate" rather than repre-senting various strands of opinion within the Party. Bensaïd argued that "if politics is a matter of choice and decision, it implies an organised plurality". The extent to which a left-wing party allows the organisation of plurality within itself can be, I think, seen as a measure of its health.

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27   *Sometimes the immovable leadership is an individual.*

28   *American Trotskyist leader James Cannon notoriously argued that any serious debate within the Party was an embodiment of class struggle, which must result in the expulsion of "petty-bour-geois" forces – which, of course, could only be identified in retrospect as whichever side lost (most notoriously here: https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1940/party/). To her credit, Dean emphasises the non-identity of party and class to the point where she gladly accepts that bour-geois individuals can and should be valued members of a Communist Party, as "through them, the proletariat believes that their situation is not just unfortunate. It is profoundly unjust." (p. 188)*

Dean comes very close, in places, to arguing that "any Party is better than none – for example, arguing that "the Party, shortcomings and all, continues to provide an ego ideal or symbolic point from which to view actions as momentous…. the actuality of the Communist Party exceeds its errors and betrayals". (pp. 227, 247) Crucially, the concept of the communist party as "subject supposed to believe" explored above is used by Dean answer a question for many of us with a history on the anti-Stalinist Left:

By 1989, only a tiny few defended the Soviet Union anymore. Most agreed that its bureau-cracy was moribund and that it needed to institute market reforms. Why, then, did its collapse have such an effect? The 'subject supposed to believe' helps make sense of this strange reaction. What was lost when the USSR fell apart was the subject onto whom belief was transposed, the subject through whom others believed. Once this believing subject was gone, it really appeared that communism was ideologically defeated. (p. 189)

The critique of corruption or betrayals by the Soviet bloc party leaders is paradoxical evidence for Dean that even a "flawed, desiccated" Party can still hold open the psychic gap (p. 190). But how does this standpoint work out in the actually existing world of sect politics? What course of action would Dean suggest, for example, for those members of Parties whose leaderships have covered up sexual abuse of members in the interests of the prestige of the leadership group? In the faction fight in the British SWP in 2011-13, the more honest propo-nents of the leadership line frankly argued that holding "the Party" together was more import-ant than holding a member of its "permanent leadership" to account. It would be interesting to put Jodi Dean in dialogue with both Alex Callinicos and the people who split from his SWP leadership.

We can argue, then, that the processes which Dean sees as cohering the Party out of the crowd/people/class may also lead – if ideological plurality is sacrificed in the leadership and/or apparatus of the Party – to the cohering of a "leadership clique/faction". Our experience seems to suggest that this process will, sooner or later, lead to the betrayal of "fidelity to the egalitarian discharge", and the death of the Party as the kind of collectivity that Dean discuss-es. But a "dead" party can actually survive for decades as a sect, a personality cult, or an expanded form of an abusive relationship. You can tell that it's dead because it has lost touch with the Big Wide World of political reality; and its members lives are lessened by belonging.

Dean discusses the debates in the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1980s, where many in the leadership ideologically surrendered to neoliberalism (pp. 50-3)[29] , but later com-

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29   *"The Italian Marxist Constanzo Preve made the point that former left-wingers who disintegrate internally tend to stop believing in anything. Having taken decisions that put them in a position in which their whole framework of values has to collapse, they come to do things no bourgeois or right-wing social-democratic politician would contemplate. Like the former [Soviet bloc leaders], who led the most ferocious neoliberal reforms: when your inner world collapses, you become a*

ments that it was as early as 1956 – when Khrushchev denounced Stalin and the Russian tanks smashed the Hungarian workers' uprising – when "the Party lost the will and capacity to make demands on itself" (p. 223). In other words, the CPGB more or less ceased to believe in itself and effectively died in 1956; it just didn't stop moving until 1992. And the corpse of the CPUSA is still shambling on, these days as a rather wan leftist pressure group inside Hilary Clinton's Democratic Party.

The argument I am going to make here, then, is: it may well be that any living party is better than none, but there is no virtue in a zombie party. You know that the Party is dead when it can no longer "make demands on itself", in Dean's terms – when the membership no longer really believes in the Party's stated mission. Self-perpetuating leadership groups will go to great extents to try to disguise that this has happened – falsifying reports and statistics, cajoling, threats, hype – but, to quote a former Australian Prime Minister, a soufflé doesn't rise twice. There is no record of a zombie party coming back to life. And when something is dead, as all good horror movies tell us, it should stop moving, lie down, decompose, and allow its components to reassemble into new life.

It's often difficult to write on any current political event without creating hostages to fortune. Dean, accordingly discusses the emergence over the past decade of "broad- left" parties, usually organised around the skeletons of old post-Communist Parties, such as Die Linke (Germany), Izquerida Unida (Spain) and SYRIZA (Greece), as creating a "new relevance for the party form":

SYRIZA's initial victories stemmed in part from innovations in communist party organizing: commitment to social movements, respect for movement's autonomy, support of local solidarity movements… SYRIZA's initial achievement demonstrated a dynamic relation between crowd and party. (p. 27)

Of course, the problem is that SYRIZA – the only one of these parties to win an election – wasted little time thereafter in jettisoning its principles, as well as its left wing, and knuckling under to the very EU-enforced austerity it was formed to oppose.[30] A former left-wing member of its leadership, Stathis Kouvelakis, has recently explained in great (if possibly not unbiased) detail how the leadership of Alexis Tspiras effectively "hollowed out" the party, removing all mechanisms by which the leadership could be held accountable to its members:

Turning SYRIZA into a leader-centred party was the second aspect of the process. The aim was to move from a militant party of the left, with strong culture of internal debate, heterogene-

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bearer of nihilism—you will do anything in order to stay in power." – Stathis Kouvelakis (https:// newleftreview.org/II/97/stathis-kouvelakis- syriza-s- rise-and- fall)

30   *If you're not familiar with the story, you could probably do worse than reading my own summary of events (https://fightback.org.nz/2015/08/21/greek-crisis- syrizas-dead- end/), she said modestly.*

ity, involvement in social movements and mobilizations, to a party with a passive membership which could be more easily manipulated by the centre, and keener to identify with the figure of the leader.[31]

The first question we have to ask here is: how could this happen? The second question is, how could this not have happened? There is an argument to be made that the very "dynamic relation between crowd and party" which Dean identifies cuts both ways. I made the argument in my article on Greece referenced above that the downturn of the mass movement on the streets of 2012 led to the growth of SYRIZA as an electoral force. You could follow up from this and say that – with electoral politics seen as a substitute for the egalitarian drive of the Syntagma Square movement and its counterparts – there was nothing to stop the Tspiras leadership once it had identified the "pragmatic" course of capitulation.

Of course, the ultra-left argument from this point was that SYRIZA was always rotten, always a waste of time, that it was always doomed to failure, that those of us who supported SYRIZA[32] should be ashamed of ourselves. But this reflects the very "politics of the beautiful moment" identified by Dean, the response to failure by arguing that we should never have tried:

To expect perfection is to displace politics into an imaginary realm sheltered from difference and disappointment. Despite SYRIZA's inability to deliver on its promises (or, more strongly, despite its betrayal of the very supporters who mobilized in its behalf), it nevertheless shifted the terrain of the possible. (p. 27)

The names "Corbyn" and "Sanders" start leaping to mind again. One major criticism of the movements associated with these figures[33] is that their leaders' conservative foreign policies (particularly troubling on the issues of Palestinian liberation and the Syrian revolution) replicate the mistakes made by the old Stalinized CPs, betraying and neutralising the promise of their progressive domestic policies. Similarly, other British comrades have argued that diverse groups and celebrities of the institutionalised Left, despite coming from an anti-Stalinist position, now occupy a space in the political sphere analogous to that of the leadership of the Stalinised and moribund 1970s CPGB[34]. The argument is that these forces prize their relationships with "high-powered" intellectual figures or union leaders over and above the interests the actually-existing movements from below. Perhaps the real, unforgivable sin from which the Party cannot recover is to lose faith in the possibility of the emergence of people, in its own members, in the "egalitarian discharge" – and to begin instead to concentrate on its relationships with "big Others" such as foreign states, NGO funding sources, "friendly" powerful individuals or, in the cases of the infamous Posadist movement, hostile UFOs.

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31   *https://newleftreview.org/II/97/stathis-kouvelakis- syriza-s- rise-and- fall*

32   *Or the Chávez government in Venezuela, for that matter.*

33   *One made regularly in entertaining and aggressive detail on Facebook by Scottish socialist Sam*

7. To summarise...

For the sake of my mental health, and of finishing this piece before the cows come home, I'm passing over a lot of the book in silence – those parts which seem to have been included to give the book academic credibility. You might find the description of Sigmund Freud's crowd psychology in reference to that of the 19th century reactionary writer Gustave LeBon and to the Paris Commune interesting. However, I don't think the power or effectiveness of Dean's argument relies on it.

What I think is the main value of Dean's work – for those of us who have the training and/or the patience to sweat our way through her Lacanian jargon and close analysis of hundred-year- old texts – is that she celebrates a model of the Party which is deeply flawed and therefore realistic. The assertion that every Party will have leaders and led and contradictions between tendencies within it makes it far more likely that we will be able to assert the discipline on ourselves necessary to make a party happen, to be able to make sacrifices for it. The unwillingness to make sacrifices for collective action – indeed, to smugly sermonize those who have given their all to try to build a party in the past that they "wasted their lives" and they would have been better getting a middle-management job at Amalgamated Bastards and buying a jet-ski – is the discourse of the "Beautiful Soul" which mourns the injustices of reality but will never try anything to make things better without a guarantee in advance that it will work and there will be no side effects (which will never happen). Her overriding influence on the need for a collective revolutionary subject – and a Party as a collective with routines and its own "affective dimension" which changes the lives of its members, and through which the coalescing of such a subject becomes conceivable – is dead right:

There is always an answer to Lenin's question "what is to be done?" And that answer is always too much. Too much is to be done and that excess is the force the Party turns on itself. The enthusiasm and solidarity that infuses the Party's commitment to ongoing political action works back on the comrades as an intensity that relentlessly pushes them from within themselves. (p. 239)

To the extent that the Left fails to recognize and take responsibility for the enabling condition of political collectivity, it will remain trapped in its own self-critique, unable to build or seize the organisations it needs. (p. 170).

Charles Hamad.

34   *Dean points out that "the CPGB… worked to concentrate its resources and energies so that it would 'seem more powerful than it was" (p. 224). Veterans of the British SWP – which built itself in the 1970s by pointing out the betrayals of the CPGB – shudder to this day at the memory of their latter-day leaderships similarly exhorting them to "punch above their weight"*

The crowd enables us to build a theory of the communist party as a synthesis or movement party. Such a party is neither the movement's vanguard nor instrument. It is a form of organized political association that holds open the space from which the crowd can see itself (and be seen) as the people. The communist party is the party faithful to the crowd's egalitarian discharge. It doesn't represent the movements. It transfers their egalitarian intensity from the particular to the universal. The communist party finds the people in the crowd. (p. 259)

However, I do think her argument is incomplete without an examination of the experiences of those who have been trying, and failing, to build such a Party (or indeed an organisation which could hold open the gap for the Party) for much of our adult lives. The argument that Dean has to make – in particular when she's defending a CPUSA "show trial" of an innocent comrade – is that the inner voice which tells us that "we have always done too much" for the sake of the party (p. 189) is not a sign that we're doing something wrong, but that we're doing something right. This leads back to Lacan's psychology, in which psychic health means accepting our own lack, our impossibility of perfection (or "castration", in his Freud-based jargon). This is a convincing argument in the abstract. But I would dearly like to see Jodi Dean defend her thesis against criticism from those who can no longer fight the good fight after decades or more in the wilderness of sects, dreaming of the beloved Party.
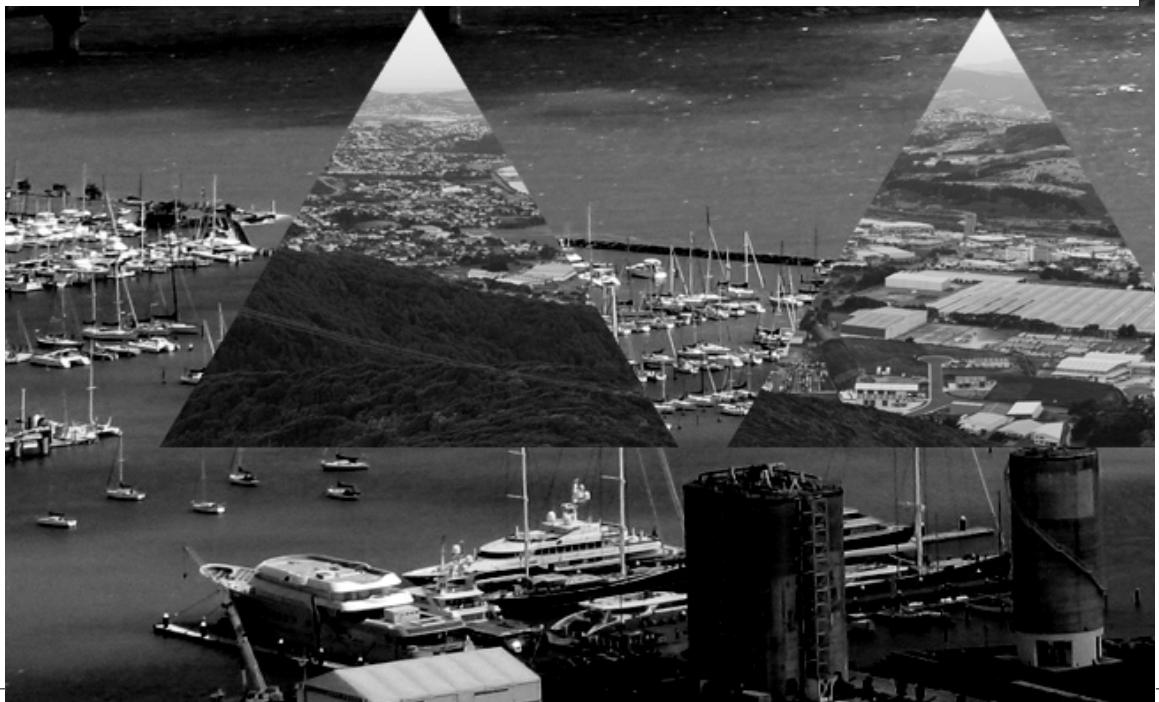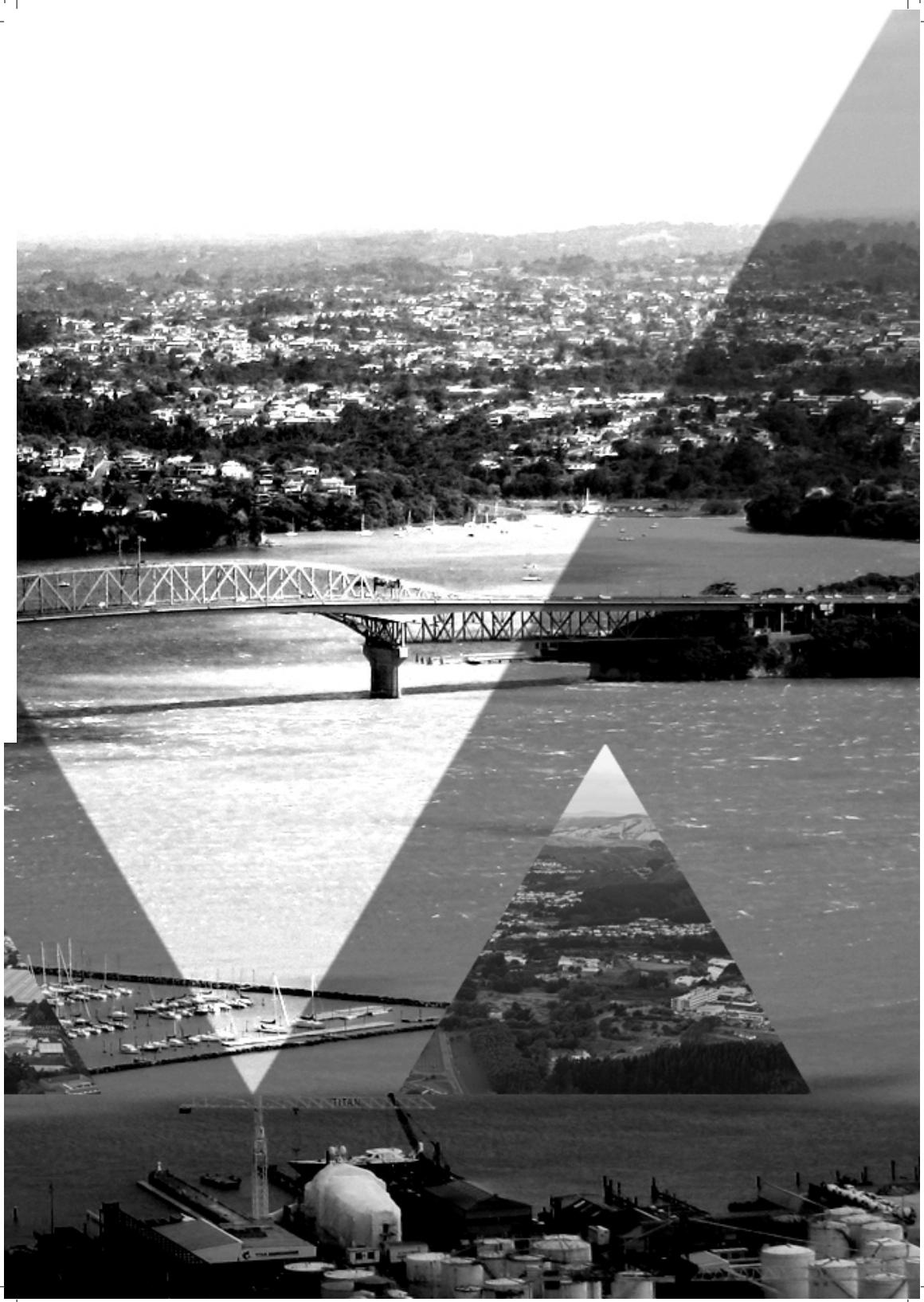
SHINING A LIGHT ON DEPRESSION

by Grant Brookes, mental health nurse and president of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO). Reprinted from NZNO blog.

A light was shone into a dark corner last month [March 2016), when NZ Doctor magazine published a blog on depression among nurses. It generated a strong reaction. When I shared the blog on social media, a lot of nurses responded.

Some of the responses were public comments. But other nurses shared stories of depression with me privately – including traumatic events which aren't talked about. I have learned of several suicides of some people in our profession in recent months.

But the overwhelming response was relief at being able to speak about this taboo subject, and a desire to get it out in the open. The nurses I spoke with also talked about why the problem is so big, and what might help.

And the problem is big – much bigger than it appears. For reasons I'll get to, nurses are not disclosing their depression.

As one nurse put it, "I'm seeing more depressed nurses trying to hide it under a smile these days". Another said that according to her GP, over 60 percent of the health professionals enrolled at that practice were on anti-depressants.

With almost two decades of experience working in adult mental health, I have an understanding of depression, from a nursing perspective.

I've practised long enough to remember old concepts like "reactive depression" (occurring in response to stressful events) and "endogenous depression" (with no previous stressor). These days, all depression is seen as linked to stress in some way.

Some of the nurses who spoke with me talked about stressors specific to their group. For the Internationally Qualified Nurses, who make up over a quarter of our workforce, there is separation from family support networks, and often cultural dislocation as well.

One mental health nurse talked about the emotional impact of "dealing with out of control behaviour". "It's a thankless job", he said.

A former prison nurse told me, "During my year working as an RN in prisons I witnessed violence and experienced cases involving sexual violence, self- harm/suicide, physical assault and death. That there was no support available from my employer is still shocking to me".

But there were also common themes. The reality for all of us in the acute care settingn is

that we relate to people in distress. As one nurse put it, we have "constant experiences of vicarious trauma".

Another common theme was expressed by a rural nurse. She told me that her team all love nursing. "We do it because we like caring. But it compromises your personal values when you can't give that care, when you know it's not ideal. It creates a conflict within yourself".

A younger nurse described the same thing. She said she had done postgrad last year and learned to name the problem. "It's moral distress", she said. Many others talked about how their mental health was affected by this stressor, too.

The increasing demands on nurses, including more and more time being spent at work, were also widely reported. "I have colleagues who work many extra unpaid hours and are constantly exhausted", a Senior Nurse told me. "It is commonplace to hear colleagues tell of how they cannot sleep at night. Some are gaining weight, others losing it, and tears are not uncommon. The relentlessness of the work is demoralizing and there is the constant fear of making a mistake".

More hours at work also means less time for the family. This leads to feelings of guilt. These are strongly associated with depression.

Sometimes these feelings of guilt are deliberately created by managers. One nurse said, "I have been told that 'it is an expectation of nurses to work beyond your scheduled hours', 'you are reluctant to change', 'what if it was your mother?', to list a few".

This is related to the problem of workplace bullying, another stressor linked to depression which was mentioned by many.

Some who shared their stories spoke of colleagues who expressed negative attitudes towards nurses with depression. But on the other hand, all mentioned others in the nursing team who had supported them.

The range of attitudes among managers appears narrower, however. I was told that nurses with depression are not supported by their managers in the way that, say, staff with health conditions like asthma or diabetes are.

"There needs to be a general acceptance that you can work with depression", a ward nurse told me. Others named what it means when nurses with depression are treated differently

by employers: "stigma". A number of people said they think this is why depression is not disclosed by nurses.

Based on this, the things which might help address this hidden epidemic start to become clear. Firstly, campaigns to destigmatise mental illness in society at large are part of the solution, to enable safe disclosure and help-seeking. The experiences of the former prison nurse also point to the need for debriefing after traumatic incidents.

Professional and clinical supervision were also raised by some of those I spoke with – and not just by mental health nurses, who use it much more often than anyone else. As one nurse said, "Supervision is not individual therapy, but it can help with problems before they get that big, and it can signal the need for extra mental health support".

But the helping strategy which was mentioned most often was EAP (Employee Assistance Programme). For employers who opt into it, EAP provides short-term counselling for staff, for free. This appears to be reasonably accessible in DHBs, but Primary Health Care Nurses told me that it's sometimes harder for them to get.

While many appreciated EAP, there was this also this comment from an Enrolled Nurse: "A service like EAP is needed to help staff acknowledge and alleviate some of the pressures, but I also understand they're not a cure and that the Ministry of Health and the government need to own some accountability for why there's added stress of late in the workplace".

This leads onto a final point, made by a Primary Health Care Nurse. Depression, and the stressors which cause it, are not just individual and workplace issues. They are social problems, too.

"There is this view among nurses that things are getting tough and that we can't do much about it. Depression can be related to the feeling that we have no control. Until nurses collectively realise this and use our influence, then I would anticipate that depression and burnout will only increase".

We all feel down from time to time, but symptoms of depression should be taken seriously if they last for more than two weeks. You might be showing a number of the warning signs, or none in particular – everyone is different. If you are in any doubt, talk to your doctor or try the Self-Test on the depression.org.nz site.

You can also

- *call the Depression Helpline to talk to a trained counsellor. They're available 24 hours a day, every day. Freephone 0800 111 757*
- *visit depression.org.nz*
- *find out about other services that can help.*
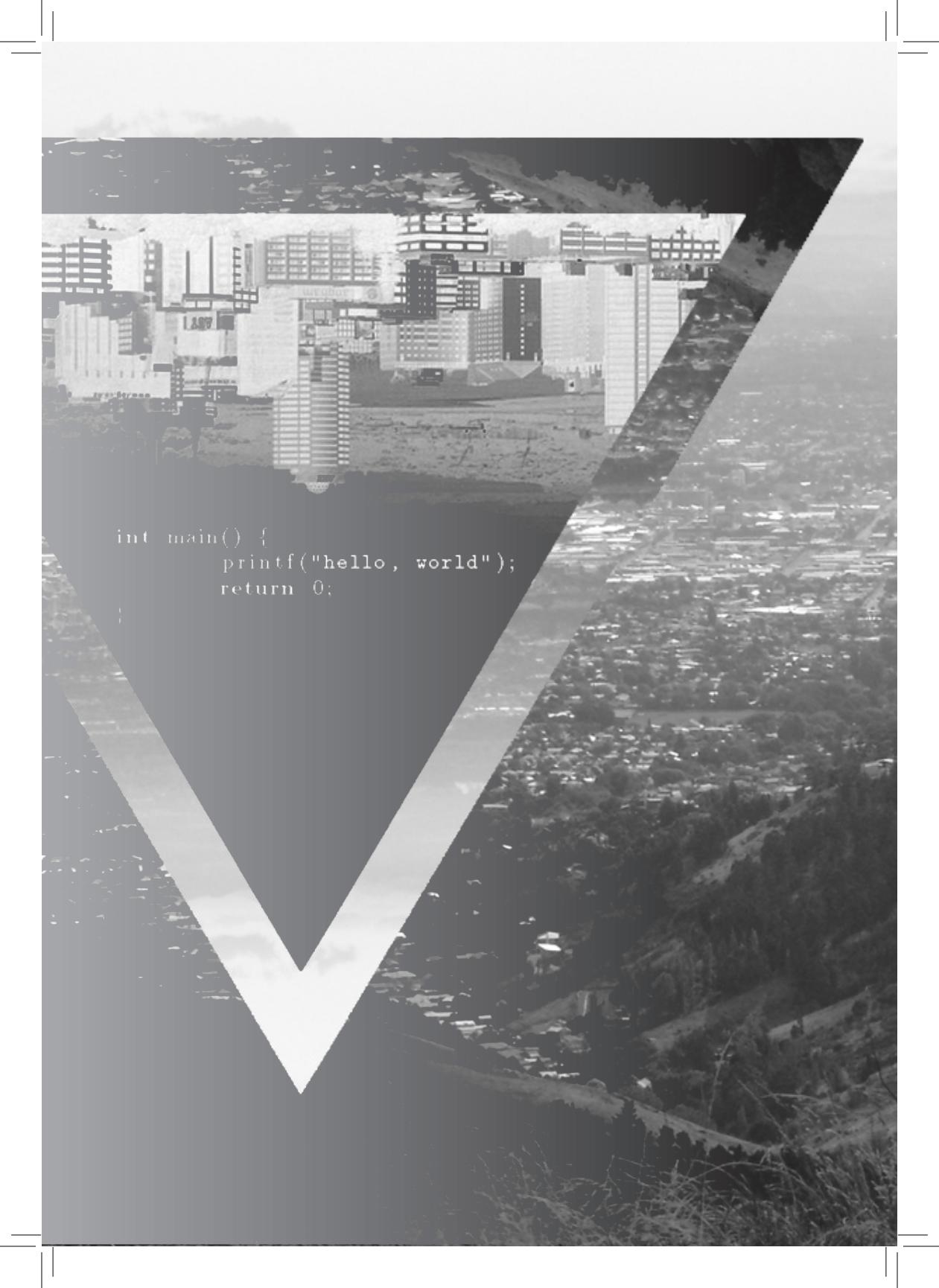
```
int main() {
        printf("hello, world");
        return 0;
}
```

10-POINT PROGRAMME

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

1. Constitutional transformation based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
2. Secure, appropriate and meaningful work for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be replaced with a Universal Basic Income.
3. International working class solidarity. Open borders, full rights for migrant workers. Recognition of Pasefika rights to self-determination. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including New Zealand state's participation in military occupations, 'free trade' agreements and surveillance agreements.
4. No revolution without women's liberation. Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. An ecosocialist solution to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
6. Freedom of information. End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7. Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.

8. Universal right to housing. Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9. Fully-funded healthcare at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.
10. Fully-funded education at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining kaupapa Maori approaches.

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